Before the Gardnerians Came to America:

Witchcraft as a Religion in the United States up to 1960

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Section 1

Introduction:
Old Witch, New Witch

1.1 The Old Witch

As H. P. Lovecraft once remarked, "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."[1] The figure of the witch, that is, of a malevolent person possessed of uncanny strange powers to do harm, is as old as fear itself.

Human malevolence, expressed by fist or club, by sword or gun, has never seemed uncanny; it is well known, and far too common. But malevolence that harms its target by some unknown means, far beyond everyday experience, is quite another matter. A malevolent person who seems able to deploy such uncanny means calls up this primal fear of the unknown. Such a person has long been called a *witch* in English.

So strong a fear demands victims, but it mostly finds scapegoats. Unusual reverses of fortune commonly strike people at random, but stricken people are loath to ascribe to happenstance what could easily be explained by malevolence. And so scapegoats must be found in any case, and their supposed uncanny power neutralized in one way or another. Often they are even killed, or driven out from their communities. As a rule, these unfortunates were not really the authors of the harm that they were accused of doing.

Of course, wherever there is a perceived threat, there is also a market for people who can counter that threat. There soon appeared professional *witch-masters* (*Hexenmeister* in German), that is, people who specialized in unwitching the bewitched, generally for some personal advantage. There are other established terms for these people, too: *unbewitchers, witchbusters,* and so forth. They have also been called *white witches*, distinguishing them from malevolent *black witches.*

Though witches were quite often a fiction demanding living scapegoats, it was otherwise with witch-masters. They were real people, who claimed mysterious powers of their own, but also claimed to use them benevolently, to protect their neighbors against the malevolent attacks of witches. In bygone centuries they could be found in almost every village. And their existence reinforced the belief in the existence of malevolent witches.

These witch-masters were a specialized kind of what Ronald Hutton has called "service magicians," that is, folk magicians who provide welcome magical services—healing, protection,

[1] Lovecraft (1945), p. 12.

and so forth—to their communities.[2] Service magic, of course, is every bit as ancient as the fear of the unknown and the uncanny.

1.2 The New Witch

And then, during the late 1800s and the early 1900s, several new developments happened, one after another, in the popular culture of the United States that gradually gave rise to a very different concept of what a witch might be.[3] It is the aim of this book to trace and document the successive steps that led to the rise of this benevolent New Witch, a figure quite distinct from the malevolent Old Witch.[4]

The benevolent New Witch, once she had been fully formed in popular imagination, resembles the malevolent Old Witch in her ability to do magic. However, the means by which she works her magic have been largely rethought.

The malevolent Old Witch was believed to work her magic in a demon-haunted world, where invisible malignant beings could be at her service if she knew an effective ritual to command them, or if she had entered into a pact with some greater power able to command them. She also knew how to use poisons found in nature, in plants and soil, to work her malice.

The New Witch, in contrast, might work her magic by using laws of nature, or by properties of natural things that had not yet become generally known in her society. Or she might work her magic with the help of the well-disposed spirits of her own ancestors and her friends' ancestors. Or she might work her magic with the aid of Nature spirits—or even of various old Gods and Goddesses, long fogotten by all but a very few, yet still inclined to be helpful to people who know and cherish them.

Moreover, magic may well be only one dish on the menu of her witchcraft. For a New Witch, her witchcraft may be, first of all, her religion. Or it may be her politics. Or some blend of the two, since religion and politics have always been deeply intertwined in much of the United States. In some cases, the New Witch may even leave all magic by the wayside, so that her witchcraft is nothing other than some combination of her religion and her politics. We will see all these possibilities as we proceed.

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[2] Hutton (2017), p. xi.

[3] Since this book is about the rise of the New Witch specifically in the United States, I have largely ignored parallel developments in England and similar ones elsewhere in the world. Yet they, too, took place.

[4] Ambrose Bierce, in his *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911), p. 367, highlights the difference between the Old and the New Witch in his usual misanthropic—here, misogynistic—fashion: "Witch, *n.* (1) An ugly and repulsive old woman, in a wicked league with the devil. (2) A beautiful and attractive young woman, in wickedness a league beyond the devil."

When witchcraft is a New Witch's religion, then in no documented case was it an underground survival of pre-Christian religion anywhere in the United States.[5] Rather, the witchcraft of the New Witch will often have been rooted in one or another relatively new, progressive religious movement. One such movement was **Spiritualism** (see section 3).

Another was **Nature Religion,** which is a convenient label for a long-standing tradition—at least in the United States—of finding the Divine in wild, untamed nature itself, not in any personal Divinity. The foremost ritual of this religion consists of simply living in wild nature, or at least in visiting it for a time, on its own wild terms—that is, not on human terms. Nature Religion can be either Pantheistic or Polytheistic, depending in part on whether one's view of nature includes other-than-human persons such as Nature Spirits or multiple Gods dwelling in the numinous places of the land.[6]

And when witchcraft is a New Witch's politics, then it is usually feminist politics, or at least, progressive politics.[7]

1.3 The Rise of the New Witch

Let us now briefly detail the four major developments that led to this concept of the New Witch and her witchcraft. The **first** of them was the discovery in the late 1700s of what was then thought to be a new force of nature, accompanied by various odd phenomena that had hitherto been considered to be magical or supernatural. Its discoverer, Franz Anton Mesmer, called that new force **Animal Magnetism**. He thought of it as a biological equivalent of the ordinary magnetism that draws iron to magnets, and he denied that there was anything supernatural about it.

His first disciples and enthusiasts called themselves Mesmerists or animal magnetizers, and variously modified his original theory about the precise nature of the force they employed. Several itinerant lecturers carried Mesmerism across the Atlantic from France to the United States during the later 1820s and the 1830s, where they found receptive audiences for their lectures. Among them perhaps the most influential was Charles Poyen.

The **second** of these new developments was the rise of a new group of religions, later called **New Thought** religions, or alternatively, **Metaphysical** religions. They sprang from the teaching of Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, who had attended one of Charles Poyen's courses of lectures,

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[5] In the few cases where ancient Pagan Deities were venerated by New Witches (see section 8), they were taken from modern published Medieval writings such as the Irish *Book of Invasions (Lebor Gabála Érenn).*

[6] On the little-studied history of Nature Religion in the United States see now Albanese (1990, 2002). Its roots reach back to the Deism of Ethan Allen (1784) and Tom Paine (1794–95), for whom see now Jacoby (2004). For an introduction to Polytheistic Nature Religion see also Greer (2005, 2023) and Paper (2005).

[7] The feminist activists who founded W.I.T.C.H.—often expanded as "Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell"—in New York City in 1968 may serve as an example of witchcraft that was (almost) wholly political. See Morgan (1970), pp. 538–553, for the original documents of W.I.T.C.H.

and had been inspired to develop an original method of mental healing. During the late 1860s and the 1870s one of Quimby's students, Mary Baker Patterson Glover (later Mary Baker Eddy), formalized some of Quimby's teachings as a new religion, which she eventually came to call Christian Science. Eddy exercised very tight control over her new church, and she did not allow any of her followers to deviate in the slightest way from her teaching. Some of her most intelligent and independent disciples were expelled, or broke away, from her new church and formed similar religious organizations of their own. Taken as a whole, these closely related break-away religions make up the New Thought movement.[8]

The **third** of these new developments was the rise of another new religion, **Spiritualism.** Its history began in 1848 in Hydesville, a village in upstate New York. Within three years it had spread throughout the northeastern United States; during the next few decades it spread throughout the entire nation. Its principal sacred activity was the Spirit Circle, or séance, during which communication between the living and the dead seemed to take place.

The **fourth** of these new developments was connected with the **First Wave of Feminism,** which began with the first Woman's Rights Convention, held at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. Two of the most prominent First-Wave Feminists, Matilda Joslyn Gage and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, eventually became radical critics of orthodox Christianity, and they wrote about how it had repressed and persecuted powerful and intelligent women over the centuries. Many of the women who had been accused of witchcraft in bygone centuries and severely punished for it, were reenvisioned by these two feminists as women of uncommon ability and knowledge for their times, far in advance of what most men knew.

From the 1890s onward, several other new trends in American culture continued to foster the growth of the New Witch. Among them were, *first,* the popularity of L. Frank Baum's fourteen children's books about the Land of Oz; *second,* Charles Godfrey Leland's intriguing new folklore books; *third,* the invention of the Hallowe'en party, where young unmarried women and men played together at living in a world of magic and witchcraft; *fourth,* the publication in the United States of various popular books on magic and witchcraft; and *fifth,* the growing market for popular fantasy and science fiction.

These further developments reached the general public through books and magazines aimed at the general reader: they were the "mass media" of the age before the wide availability of television and, later, of the personal computer. By the time electronic mass media had come to dominate popular thought in the United States, these earlier forms of New Witchcraft had already felt the strong pull of British Wicca, and the era was fast coming to an end when most witches in the United States had never so much as heard of Gerald Brosseau Gardner, the father of British Wicca.

And that is the point at which our tale of this history will come to its end.

[8] See now Albanese (2007). The New Thought religions either include or exclude Christian Science, depending on the scholar. Earlier studies by Braden (1958, 1963) and Judah (1967) are still worth close reading.

Section 2

Animal Magnetism and the Metaphysical Movement

2.1 The European Background of Animal Magnetism

The theory and practice of animal magnetism were first elaborated by Franz Anton Mesmer, working in Vienna and then in Paris, during the 1770s and 1780s. Mesmer's original theory and practice underwent considerable alterations over the next several decades at the hands of several of his students, the foremost of whom was Amand-Marie-Jacques de Castenet, Marquis de Puységur.[9]

By 1800 the usual practice, following Puységur's lead, had come to involve an operator, or magnetizer, and a subject, whom the magnetizer would put into a semi-sleeping state, or what we would now call a trance. Such an entranced subject was usually called a *somnambule,* or *somnambulist,* which usually means sleepwalker, but here is more narrowly used to mean an entranced magnetic subject.

Animal-magnetic trances were originally used to diagnose and to heal illnesses. Very soon, however, French magnetizers discovered that their entranced subjects could also exercise seemingly preternatural powers, such as reading the unspoken thoughts of another (telepathy), seeing or hearing at a distance or through a barrier (clairvoyance and clairaudience), foretelling future events (precognition), and even communicating with spirits and other disincarnate beings in visions. Such sensational marvels only increased public interest in animal magnetism.

At the same time other French scholars were attempting to find rational, scientific explanations for the seeming effectiveness of the magical and occult practices of bygone centuries. In 1829 Eusebe Salverte published his ground-breaking work *Des occultes sciences, ou essai sur la magie, les prodiges et les miracles* in two volumes. (An English translation, *The Occult Sciences: The Philosophy of Magic, Prodigies and Apparent Miracles,* was published in New York in 1847.) Salverte examined a wide range of seemingly preternatural occurences throughout recorded history, which previous scholars had often dismissed as fictions or deceptions, and he found satisfactory explanations for their reality in terms of the accepted science of his day. Though Salverte gave only a single sentence to animal magnetism in his work, his scientific approach to the explanation of apparently preternatural phenomena could readily be applied at greater length to the marvels of animal magnetism.

[9] For animal magnetism and its development see Ellenberger (1970), chh. 1–3; Crabtree (1988); Crabtree (1993), chh. 7–13; and Gauld (1995), chh. 2–3, 6–10.

Other European and British authors followed in Salverte's footsteps, but paid considerable attention to animal magnetism as well. In 1836 James Campbell Colquhoun published his *Isis Revelata,* followed in 1851 by his *History of Magic, Witchcraft and Animal Magnetism.* In Germany Joseph Ennemoser published his *Geschichte der Magie* in 1844 (as the first part of a planned history of animal magnetism); it appeared in English translation as *History of Magic* in 1854.[10] Though these three titles were published in London, the thriving transatlantic book trade made them readily available in the United States as well.

In France, too, one very influential magnetizer, Jules Denis, Baron du Potet de Sennevoy, was struck by the close similarity of animal magnetism and magic. His influential handbook of animal magnetism had been published in 1837 in French, and appeared in English translation in 1838 as *An Introduction to the study of Animal Magnetism.* However, in contrast to most other authors on animal magnetism, du Potet sought to use phenomena of animal magnetism to revitalize the practice of magic. In 1852 he had a book printed—for private distribution only—under the title *La magie dévoilée, ou principes de science occulte* ("Magic Unveiled, or Principles of Occult Science"). He made this book available at a very high price only to select people and only under a pledge of strictest secrecy.[11]

Thanks to all these authors, it came to be accepted widely that magic, witchcraft and other occult practices could really work, or at least could *seem* to work, for reasons that the most rational, materialistic scientist could accept. In that sense at least, it had become impossible to dismiss all magic and all witchcraft as mere delusion or deception.

2.2 Animal Magnetism Comes to the United States

In the early 1800s two French magnetizers crossed the Atlantic and brought the theory and practice of animal magnetism to the United States. The first of them was Joseph du Commun, who supported himself as a teacher of French in the U.S. Military Academy at West Point for fourteen years (1817–1831), but also occasionally lectured on animal magnetism. In 1829 Du Commun published *Three Lectures on Animal Magnetism,* but his book seems to have attracted little notice at the time.

Du Commun's interest in animal magnetism may, however, have caught the attention of a cadet who was at West Point for only one year (1830-1831), a young man named Edgar Allan Poe.[12] Poe made effective use of animal magnetism in several of his stories of horror from 1843–1844. Also, an anonymously published pamphlet, *The Philosophy of Animal Magnetism Together with the System of Manipulating Adopted* [sic] *to produce Ecstasy and Somnambulism*

[10] On Ennemoser see now Hanegraaff (2011).

[11] It was republished more openly in 1893, after its author's death. A much abridged English translation appeared around 1927 under the title *Magnetism and Magic.*

[12] The Commandant of Cadets at West Point from 1829 through 1833 was a man named Ethan Allen Hitchcock, who overlapped both du Commun's and Poe's years there. Hitchcock became a career military officer, but also wrote a number of influential books about esoteric and occult subjects. See Cohen (1951); Versluis (2001), ch. 5.

(1837), by "A Gentleman of Philadelphia," has been attributed to Poe, but without compelling evidence.[13]

Around 1835 a second French magnetizer, Charles Poyen, arrived in the United States. In sharp contrast to du Commun, Poyen worked vigorously to bring animal magnetism to the attention of the general public. In 1836 he undertook a lecture tour throughout New England. In 1837 he published an account of his lecture tour, *Progress of Animal Magnetism in New England.* Poyen's lectures seem to have attracted much more public attention than du Commun's ever did. This was largely because Poyen brought a woman somnambulist along with him on his tour and exhibited her seemingly preternatural powers to his audiences.[14]

During the next ten years animal magnetism and its wonders became all the rage throughout New England and as far south as Pennsylvania and Virginia, with twenty or thirty traveling lecturers speaking about it in New England, and two or three hundred practicing magnetizers in Boston alone.[15] More than thirty books and pamphlets on animal magnetism were published in the United States between 1837 and 1847, most of them in Boston, New York or Philadelphia.[16]

There were already long-standing traditions of magical practice and occult philosophy in the United States, but they had usually been regarded as problematic, or sometimes even as satanic.[17] Now, however, a secular, even scientific explanation for many of these practices was available for the first time, which could even serve to legitimize the practices themselves. They could be treated as natural, scientific phenomena rather than "satanic temptations."

The United States, too, had already had to reckon with men and women who had famously claimed to speak with spirits in ecstasy or trance. First, there were the followers of the Swedish visionary Emmanuel Swedenborg, who had formed themseves into an organized church as early as 1817, the Church of the New Jerusalem. Second, there was Joseph Smith, Jr., whose visions (so he said) had begun as early as the 1820s, who published *The Book of Mormon* in 1830, and whose followers organized themselves into the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints shortly thereafter. And third, there were the Shakers, followers of Mother Ann Lee, who had come from England to the United States in 1774. Around 1837 a wave of "manifestations" (as the Shakers called them) swept through the Shaker communities, a period filled with revelatory visions of the late Ann Lee herself as well as other heavenly spirits. The various phenomena of animal magnetism, as exhibited by its somnambulists, gave Americans who were not adherents of any of those three faiths a convenient scientific explanation for all these marvelous events, an explanation which did not privilege the faiths themselves with any special degree of religious authority.

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[13] Jackson (1928) conjectured that Poe might have been its author, without much in the way of hard evidence. His conjecture seems not to have been generally accepted.

[14] See Carlson (1960), Fuller (1982), pp. 17–26, and Quinn (2007) on Poyen's activity in the United States.

[15] Anonymous (1843), p. 8.

[16] See Crabtree (1988), #380–556 *passim,* for a full bibliography of books from 1837 through 1847.

[17] See Quinn (1987, 1998), Brooke (1994), Benes (1995), Butler (1979, 1990) and Godbeer (1992, 2005).

One Swedenborgian, George Bush, was well aware of the similarities between Swedenborg's visions of spiritual realms and the visions of animal magnetism's entranced somnambulists. He wrote a hefty volume comparing the two, *Mesmer and Swedenborg,* which appeared in 1847, and appears to have been widely read.

Animal magnetism in the United States found its critics as well. One of them was David Meredith Reese, author of *Humbugs of New York* (1838). Reese was one of the very first in the United States to make a connection between the phenomena of animal magnetism and those attributed to witchcraft in bygone centuries, though he thought each a humbug:

> It cannot be doubted that if this imposture should continue to gain credence or countenance in the community, the infatuation and crimes of Salem witchcraft are to be re-enacted in our times. For should an individual be found dead, having fallen into the fire, it will be ascribed by superstitious believers in the humbug, to some neighboring or distant magnetizer, whose witchery has done the deed. And who shall control the popular indignation, or limit the infliction of the penalties of the Lynch code, should the superstitions of Animal Magnetism become a public and reigning humbug[?][18]

2.3 Phineas Parkhurst Quimby and His Heirs

In the audience for one set of Poyen's lectures (at Portland, Maine, in 1836) was a clockmaker named Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802–1866). In him Poyen's lectures sparked a train of thought that would have enormous consequences for the subsequent history of religions in the United States, though not so much for the history of witchcraft that we are tracing here. Quimby attended other lectures by other itinerant magnetizers as well, and eventually he mastered the art for himself. For a while he, too, lectured as an itinerant magnetizer, working with a good somnambulist named Lucius Burkmar. However, Quimby's interest in animal magnetism soon became focused on its ability to heal what we today would call psychosomatic illnesses. By about 1850 he had set up his own healing practice, which eventually made no use of either a somnambulist or any medicines, but worked solely on the mind of the patient. Neither the patient nor Quimby himself were in any sort of trance during this process; any healing that took place was simply due to the effect that Quimby's perceptive words, and the thoughts they conveyed, had on the patient's mind and the patient's own understanding of his illness.[19]

Quimby trained some of his patients in his methods of mind cure, and he also allowed them to make copies of some of his unpublished writings that detailed his methods.[20] Quimby's

[18] Reese (1838), p. 61.

[19] On Quimby see Fuller (1982), pp. 118–139.

[20] Quimby himself never published any book or pamphlet about his methods, though he was a voluminous writer. Only more than a century after his death were most of his writings made available in print to the public at large. See Quimby (1988). Before that edition, only an unreliable edition of a select few of Quimby's manuscripts ever

students soon began to refer to his method as "mental cure" or "mind cure."[21] From them came a variety of new religions that are known collectively as the Metaphysical movement.

2.4 Mary Baker Eddy and Christian Science

One of Quimby's pupils was the redoubtable Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910, who was the eventual founder of a new religion and method of healing that she called "Christian Science."[22] She, like Quimby, took on students and instructed them in her own method of healing, which seems to have differed somewhat from Quimby's in various ways. After a few early short publications, in 1875 she published a substantial book titled *Science and Health.* She kept on republishing this work throughout her long life, making changes—sometimes substantial, sometimes quite minor—from one edition to the next.[23] At the time of her death her book had gone through approximately two hundred fifty successive editions.

Eddy had no more interest in witchcraft than the average person of her time, but she was well acquainted with animal magnetism. The power which it gave the magnetizer over the mind and body of other persons seems to have frightened and horrified her from quite early on. Even in the first edition of *Science and Health,* she was adamant that "mesmerism" (as she then called it) was a force for evil only, never for good, and that no one should ever try to practice it with any beneficial purpose in view. In later editions she changed her terminology slightly, calling it "animal magnetism" instead of "mesmerism," but her view of it never changed throughout her long life. It was an evil and powerful thing, she thought, and it could also be used to commit crimes that could never be proven in any court of law. Such evil doings, she was certain, were examples of what the Bible condemned as witchcraft—as was all of Spiritualism, with which she had also become well acquainted in her younger years.[24] During the later years of her life, "malicious animal magnetism" became a constant concern of hers, as she believed that some of her disaffected former students and others were regularly deploying it to kill or harm her.[25]

2.5 The Metaphysical Religions and Mental Magic

The group of related religions known as the Metaphysical movement, or the New Thought movement, somewhat resemble Christian Science in that they center their teaching on the

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appeared in print, edited by the son of two of Quimby's students; the editor himself knew Quimby only at second hand, through his parents (Dresser 1921).

[21] For examples, see Evans (1869, 1885).

[22] There are many older studies of Eddy and her church; of the newer ones, Gill (1998) is excellent. On Eddy and Spiritualism see Braude (1989), pp. 182–191.

[23] See Orgain (1933) for the very complicated editorial history of Eddy's book.

[24] See, for instance, the first three editions of *Science and Health:* Eddy (1875), p. 107; Eddy (1878), pp. 47, 143–144; Eddy (1881), I, p. 176; II, pp. 52, 70.

[25] See, for instance, the account by Adam Dickey, who was an intimate of her household during her last two years: Dickey (1927), pp. xiv–xvii, 32–57, 73–74, 107, 116–119, 123–130. See also Bates & Dittemore (1932), chh. 21, 23.

power of mind over matter, of thought over physical reality.[26] Some early Metaphysical teachers, such as Warren Felt Evans or Julius and Antoinette Dresser, had been students of Quimby himself. Others, such as Emma Curtis Hopkins, were former Christian Scientists who had been close to Mary Baker Eddy, but fell out with her, or she with them, later. Yet others, such as Malinda Eliot Cramer in San Francisco, developed similar views in relative independence from either Quimby or Eddy.[27]

So far as I know, no major author within the Metaphysical movement wrote very much about witchcraft as such.[28] However, one such author, William Walker Atkinson (1862–1932) wrote a substantial book between 1907 and 1912 that set forth his detailed theory of what he called "mental magic"—essentially a theory of how thought itself can be deployed to shape and alter material reality. In its final form, his book had the title, *Mind Power: The Secret of Mental Magic.*[29] This book has remained in print continuously from 1912 down to the present. It has had considerable influence, both direct and indirect, on the subsequent development of magic and witchcraft in the United States over the course of the twentieth century.

Atkinson's theory is complex, and its details need not concern us here. At its heart lies a thing which he calls Mind-Power, which is infinite and unbounded: its center is everywhere and its circumference nowhere. It existed before the physical world: it brings the physical world into existence, shaping and forming it. It inheres in every person, who thus has the ability to shape and form the physical world in small ways. But this ability can only be exercised if one has trained one's mind to deploy the forces of Desire and of Will in ways that allow them to work in tandem effectively. As he says,

> the trouble with the majority of people is that they *do not know just what they want,*

but are rendered ineffectual by their multitude of conflicting desires and wills.[30] Much of Atkinson's book consists of quite reasonable exercises by which one can eventually reduce this conflict to unity of desire and will, and begin to deploy Mind-Power effectively.

Atkinson has little to say about witchcraft specifically, for he regards it as merely another name, from a benighted age, for the exercise of Mind-Power. His most telling statement about it is merely that

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[26] See now Albanese (2007) on the entire movement and its background. Its central idea had been popularly stated in the catch-phrase, "the power of mind over matter," which has been traced as far back as 1837 in connection with animal magnetism: Fuller (1982), p. 22, 143, 148, 157.

[27] See her retrospective account of her own early history: Cramer (1894/1895).

[28] Among the very minor authors, however, there is Zena Maher's pamphlet of 42 pages, *The Witch Hypnotizer* (1892), privately published in San Francisco.

[29] Atkinson first published his theory in 1907 as two books, titled *The Secret of Mental Magic: A Course of Seven Lessons* and *Mental Fascination.* In 1908 the two books were revised and combined into a single volume with the title *Mind Power; or, the Law of Dynamic Mentation.* This volume was then revised very lightly; in its final form it appeared in 1912 under the title given above. See Atkinson (1907[a], 1907[b[, 1908 and 1912).

[30] Atkinson (1912), p. 351.

> all the charms in the world—all the witchcraft and Voodoo material agencies—can produce no other effect than is allowed them by the minds of the persons sought to be affected. Fear and belief determines *[sic]* the degree of receptivity to such influences.[31]

2.6 Andrew Jackson Davis

Among the many people who attended lecture-demonstrations on animal magnetism was a shoemaker's apprentice named Andrew Jackson Davis, in Poughkeepsie, New York, in 1843. Although Davis was not able to enter into a somnambulistic trance that day, shortly thereafter another magnetizer succeeded with him where the first had failed. Soon Davis found that he could put himself into somnambulistic trances at will. He left his cobbler's bench and embarked on a profitable career as "The Seer of Poughkeepsie." At first he sought success as an itinerant lecturer and magnetic healer, but he soon discovered that publishing volumes of his spiritual visions and revelations was far more lucrative. All in all, he published about thirty books over the course of some forty years. Almost all of his publications were reprinted many times during the rest of Davis's life and for many years afterwards. Several hundred thousand individual copies of almost all of his various works circulated among the reading public.

Davis's "Harmonial Philosophy" (as he called it) strongly reminded his readers of Swedenborg's works, which were readily available and widely read in Davis's time. Yet Davis insisted that he had not read Swedenborg. It was the presumed independence of their quite similar revelations that made each of them seem all the more authoritative to contemporary readers.

Perhaps the most significant innovation that Davis made in the practice of animal magnetism in the United States was his invention of the Spirit Circle, a practice which he claimed enhanced the productivity of animal-magnetic somnambulism. He first introduced the Spirit Circle in 1851, in his *The Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse.* In 1853, in his *The Present Age and Inner Life, A Sequel to the Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse,* he slightly revised his instructions for the Spirit Circle.[32]

According to Davis, a Spirit Circle should consist of twelve people, six men and six women, as well as one (or possibly two) mediums, all seated around a circular table. In 1851 the six men are to be seated together to the left of the mediums, and the six women are to be seated to the left of the men, that is, to the right of the mediums.[33] In 1853 Davis changed his recommended

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[31] Atkinson (1912), p. 335.

[32] Davis 1851, pp. 96–100; Davis 1853, pp. 75–77.

[33] Here Davis was somewhat ahead of his time, noting that "the terms [men and women] should not be applied and confined exclusively to mere organizations; for some individuals who wear the physical vesture of the male are, in their characters, females; and vice versa" (Davis 1851, p. 97). In other words, it is not physical bodies, but what Davis calls temperaments, that determine whether a person counts as male or female for purposes of spirit communication.

seating arrangement so than men and women alternated in their seating around the table, with a man at the left of the mediums and a woman at their right. The sitters may be connected with one another by a specially prepared magnetic cord, lying on their laps and held in their hands. Alternatively, they may simply join hands around the table. Either way, the physical connection serves to establish "an equilibrium of vital electricity and vital magnetism" around the circle, which makes it easier to communicate with spirits.[34]

A Spirit Circle as Recommended by Andrew Jackson Davis (1853, p. 76)

As we shall see in the next section, the Spirit Circle soon became the principal ritual of a new religion, Spiritualism.

[34] Davis (1851), p. 99.

Section 3

Spiritualism and Witchcraft in the Nineteenth Century

3.1 The Rise of Spiritualism and Spirit Circles

By the later 1840s, therefore, the United States was primed and ready for new preternatural marvels and new revelations from spirits. And they appeared, as if on cue, though they were not quite as expected.

In 1848 in Hydesville, a small village in upstate New York, the house of John Fox and his family seemed to have become haunted. Strange rapping noises began to be heard at all hours. One of his daughters (age 15) took a notion to test the haunt, and she was clever enough to give it problems that could be answered simply by the number of raps. Mrs. Fox then asked the haunt further questions, putting many of them into a simple form that could be answered yes (two raps) or no (one rap). In this way a dramatic narrative emerged: the raps were being made by the spirit of a peddler who had been murdered in that house four years ago (that is, three years before the Fox family had moved to Hydesville from Rochester), and who had been buried in its cellar. The peddler said that he had been 31 years old, that his wife had been dead for two years at the time of his murder, and that he had left two sons and three daughters orphaned. He had been murdered for the money he carried, $500.00. He identified his murderer, but said the man could not be brought to justice. Many neighbors came over to witness the raps and question the spirit that seemed to be making them; the answers the raps gave were consistent throughout.[35]

Because so many neighbors heard the noises and witnessed the questions and answers, news of the marvel soon spread far and wide throughout upstate New York and beyond: now at last a seemingly reliable means had been discovered to communicate with the spirits of the dead. Such a sensational discovery immediately eclipsed any concern for the murdered peddler himself.

The discovery suited the time and place of its occurrence very well. Upstate New York had been beset by religious fervor and ferment for decades, to the point where some referred to it as the "Burned-Over District."[36] More recently, Joscelyn Godwin has called it the "Upstate Cauldron."[37]

[35] Lewis (1848) gives the first and fullest account of these events, which some later authors have slightly distorted.
[36] Cross (1950), introduced the term into twentieth-century historiography, though his discussion of Mesmerism and Spiritualism (pp. 341–352) is short and not very well informed.
[37] Godwin (2015).

One of the main issues there at that time was precisely the fate of the dead, that is, who of them had gone to heaven and who to hell; and what the odds were that any living person might end up in the one place or the other after death. Strict Calvinists maintained that each person had been predestined to the one or the other fate before birth, no matter how he had actually lived his life. Universalists claimed that everyone would be saved from hellfire, no matter what his faith. Others took a middle road, and thought that one's ultimate destiny depended on whether or not one had undergone a Christian conversion experience. The stakes were very high indeed, as was anxiety over one's own individual fate. And now, at last, it seemed possible to ask the dead themselves what the truth of the matter might be. This made all the difference!

Within five years the news of these events in Hydesville had spread throughout the United States, and very many people set out to find answers for themselves by questioning the spirits. And, as we saw in the preceeding section, Andrew Jackson Davis had already introduced the practice of the Spirit Circle to the public at large in 1851. The two earliest descriptions we have of Spirit Circles from the pens of other Spiritualists expressly cite Davis as their authority.[38] Both descriptions were written in Philadelphia, where there were said to be between 50 and 60 Spirit Circles already in operation.[39] Doubtless there were equal or greater numbers of Spirit Circles in Boston and New York.

In these Spirit Circles quite lengthy communications could be received, apparently from spirits, by the one or the other of two processes that were rather more flexible than listening for raps in answer to specific questions.

One of these two processes involved spelling out a longer message letter by letter. Three ways to do this had been devised as early as 1851.

In the first, and slowest, of these ways, a person would recite the alphabet over and over, expecting that a rap would identify each successive letter of the incoming message. The other two ways made use of a card with the alphabet written or printed on it in large letters. In one of them, the medium would slowly move her forefinger, or a pencil, over the alphabet-card until a rap indicated the next letter of the incoming message. This could be done somewhat more rapidly than by reciting the alphabet aloud. In the other, no raps were expected: the medium's forefinger or pencil would simply point to each successive letter of the incoming message in turn.[40]

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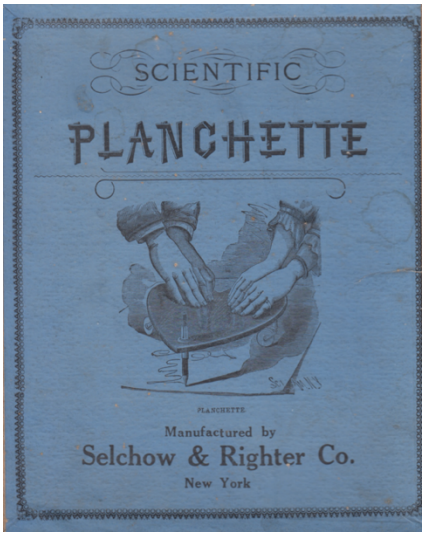
[38] Anonymous (1851), pp. 28–32; Anonymous (1852), pp. 3–4.

[39] Anonymous (1851), p. 3.

[40] Anonymous (1851), pp. 47–49; Samson (1852), pp. 13–14; Putnam (1853), pp. 9–11. By 1886 a fourth way had been devised, which dispensed with the services of a professional medium: a very small wooden "table" was set on the alphabet card and touched or lightly held by several sitters at once. Its automatic movements pointed to each successive letter of the incoming message: see Anonymous (1886a, 1886b, 1886c). This, of course, was the immediate ancestor of the commercial ouija boards that began to be manufactured in the early 1890s.

The other of these new processes employed what is now called automatic writing, where the hand of the person receiving the message, holding a pencil, simply writes it out on paper at a very high speed, without any conscious mental effort at composition or communication.[41] Here, too, a simple device to steady the pencil while allowing it to move swiftly over the paper, was soon devised: this was called a planchette.[42]

Above: A Planchette
(J. B. 1867, p. 487)



Right: Cover of the box
for Selchow & Righter's
"Scientific Planchette"
(from the author's collection)

Almost overnight the Spirit Circle became the principal ritual of this new religious movement, which very soon had begun to be called "Spiritualism." Spiritualism adopted some of the other familiar features of Protestant Sunday worship, including the use of instrumental music, inspirational reading (in the early days, from the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis), prayer, and singing new Spiritualist hymns.[43] Indeed, within a very few years Spiritualism had come to be regarded by almost everyone as a religion in its own right, wholly distinct from Protestant Christianity.

The Spirit Circle, as it developed during the first years of Spiritualism, soon moved beyond mere communications with spirits. Very soon it also became a site of the same preternatural marvels that had been produced over the last decade or so by somnambulists under the influence of animal magnetism: clairvoyance and clairaudience, telepathy, precognition, telekinesis, and so forth.[44]

[41] Anonymous (1851), pp. 49–50.
[42] Kardec (1857), pp. 8, 17, was probably the first to refer in print to such a device as a *planchette.* Planchettes were being used by Spiritualists as early as 1859 in London, according to Shorter (1859), pp. 45–46, and in Boston, according to Anonymous (1859).
[43] Anonymous (1851) prints ten such hymns on its last pages (pp. 102–108).
[44] It is worth noting that quite early on "magnetic circle" and even "magic circle" were used as alternate terms for Spirit Circles: see, for example, Campbell (1851), pp. 39, 50.

3.2 Reassessing the Witches of Salem: George Whitefield Samson

In New England the witchcraft trials of the 1690s at Salem were still a vivid historical memory in the 1800s, and the preternatural doings of the accused witches were acknowledged to bear an uncanny resemblance to the marvels produced by mediums, and by somnambulists before them.

The first to point out this similarity was not a Spiritualist, but an ordained Baptist minister, George Whitefield Samson (1819–1896), whose interest in the phenomena of animal magnetism had been aroused by Charles Poyen while he was still an undergraduate student at Brown University in Rhode Island in the late 1830s. In 1852 he published a slim book, *"To Daimonion," or the Spiritual Medium: Its Nature Illustrated by the History of Its Uniform Mysterious Manifestation When Unduly Excited,* under the pseudonym "Traverse Oldfield."[45]

In his book Samson claimed that the accusations brought against the accused witches at Salem in the 1690s were not false, and were not due to hysteria, delusion or fraud. By and large, he wrote, strange things really happened in Salem as the witchcraft trial records claim they did. However, these things were not caused by witchcraft or any other sort of magic. Rather, they were the work of gifted innocents who ignorantly made use of this natural, physical force in the human organism—this force is the "spiritual medium" of his book's title—without knowing what they did, or how they did it.[46]

Samson published three further editions of his book under his own name, each with a new and different title: in 1860 its title was *Spiritualism Tested; or, the Facts of its History Classified, and their Cause in Nature Verified from Ancient and Modern Testimonies.* In 1869 it was reissued as *Physical Media in Spiritual Manifestations. The Phenomena of Responding Tables and the Planchette, and their Physical Cause in the Nervous Organism, Illustrated from Ancient and Modern Testimonies.* Its final edition appeared in 1881 as *The Physical in Spiritualism; or, the Spiritual Medium not Psychical, but Physical. Illustrated by Attested Facts in Universal History and Confirmed by the Ruling Philosophy of All Ages.* Despite the different titles, all four editions are substantially the same book, with an additional short chapter at the end in the last two editions. During the years when the last three editions were published, Samson was the much respected President of Columbia College in Washington, D.C., and he seems to have felt secure enough in his position that he could acknowledge his authorship of the book that he had initially thought wise to publish under a pseudonym.[47]

[45] The words "spiritual medium" in the title of this book do not refer to people who are Spiritualist mediums, but to a posited invisible natural force, or medium, by virtue of which animal magnetizers are able to produce mysterious phenomena in their somnambulists. The Greek words *to daimonion* refer to "the little daemon" of Socrates, who (that ancient Greek said) had guided his actions during the course of his life.
[46] Samson (1852), pp. 45–58.
[47] Cathcart (1881), pp.1024–1025.

3.3 Reassessing the Witches of Salem: Allen Putnam

Not many years had passed before another man, formerly a Unitarian minister, but now a convinced Spiritualist, addressed the same facts, but came to a somewhat different conclusion than Samson had. He was Allen Putnam (1802–1887), and he was a descendant through both his father and his mother of the Putnam family of old Salem. He had grown up in the house in Salem Village (now Danvers) built by his great-great-grandfather, Thomas Putnam, around 1640, in which many of his Putnam forebears had lived their lives. In his boyhood one of his grandfathers (presumably his father's father, Israel Putnam, who lived in the same house) had told him tales of the famous witchcraft trials, tales that the old man in his own younger years had heard from his grandfathers in turn, men who had lived in Salem Town and Salem Village while the witch-hunt was underway, and had played their significant parts in it.[48] Allen Putnam had, therefore, compelling personal reasons to turn his attention to the events of 1692, and to try to ease the burden of shame that many of his contemporaries in Salem still carried about that part of their ancestral history.

In 1858 Putnam published the results of his studies as a pamphlet under the title *Mesmerism, Spiritualism, Witchcraft and Miracle: A Brief Treatise, Showing that Mesmerism is a Key Which Will Unlock Many Chambers of Mystery.* In its opening pages he laid out his thesis as follows:

> As seen by me now, Mesmerism, Spiritualism, Witchcraft, Miracles, all belong to one family, all have a common root, and are developed by the same laws. The *spirits of men* perform these wonders; and all of them do it, and have ever done it, by substantially the same process. When these spirits are embodied, we call their work mesmeric, or a result of animal or human magnetism: when the spirits are disembodied, we call their operations Spiritualism. Living men, and dead ones too, are mesmerizers.[49]

Thus, where Samson had posited only the workings of a physical, natural force, Putnam saw the work of spirits as well. Elsewhere in the same pamphlet he acknowledges both explanations:

> The prophets, seers, and magicians of all ages and nations may have been all they claimed to be, and yet have been only mesmeric subjects and spirit-mediums.[50]

And all this bears on the witch-hunt of 1692:

> The matter of Witchcraft is worthy of farther *[sic]* notice. There have been some efforts made of late to give the public an impression that most of the troubles of the Witchcraft-times were traceable to the diseased fancies and croakings of a

[48] Putnam (1880), p. 16. Cf. Putnam (1858), p. 28.
[49] Putnam (1858), p. 6.
[50] Putnam (1858), p. 33.

> few bedridden old women and some weak and silly children. Such efforts result, no doubt, from that state of mind which inclines one to ignore and disbelieve any facts which *seem* supernatural, however strong the testimony to their occurrence. But it is a libel upon our fathers to regard their testimony as false, and then exhibit the strong, brave men themselves as so weak, foolish, and timid as to let mere *ghost-stories* disturb, to its very foundation, the peace of both Church and State. Unless we ignore ten eventful years of New England's history, we must allow that the leading facts of Witchcraft did occur. Its sights were seen, its sounds were heard, its extraordinary works were performed.[51]

Like Samson, Putnam claimed that the charges against the accused witches rest on honestly reported experiences of real people, and cannot be explained away as the simple product of hysteria, delusion or outright fraud. But, unlike Samson, he claimed that the accused were actually undeveloped spiritualist mediums, who were largely ignorant of the spirit forces behind their mediumship.

Over the next few decades Putnam put together a substantial book to support the same thesis, which he published in 1880 under the title, *Witchcraft of New England Explained by Modern Spiritualism.* Most of it is a detailed case-by-case examination of the surviving testimony against most of the accused in light of his thesis. However, one page is worthy of note in connection with our present investigation. Here Putnam goes so far as to say—somewhat playfully—that Spiritualist mediums, since they are the same thing as the witches of bygone days, may rightly be called "witches," and he does call them witches. With reference to these mediums, he writes:

> The present century is learning facts which teach that inborn properties and susceptibilities, and not compacts with the devil, constitute *witches*—some of whom are very lovely.[52]

Allen Putnam, so far as it is known, never acted as a medium himself, though he frequently attended sittings with mediums. He would have had no grounds, therefore, to call *himself* a prophet, a seer, a magician—or a witch. If we seek people who take his view of the matter and also go so far as to call *themselves* witches, we must look for them among Spiritualist mediums. And it is there that we shall find them, albeit they will prove to be few in number.

3.4 Emma Hardinge Britten: Somnambulist, Medium—and Witch.

Emma (Floyd) Hardinge Britten (1823–1899) is one of the more complex and interesting women who ever entered public life as a Spiritualist medium. She was born in Bethnal Green, outside

[51] Putnam (1858), pp. 55–56.
[52] Putnam (1880), p. 342.

of London, the oldest of four children. Her father, a schoolmaster named Ebenezer Floyd, died when she was 11 years old, and she had to find gainful work to help keep her family together.

One of the several positions young Emma obtained, not long before she turned 13, entailed working as a somnambulist for a group of well-off men (and at least one woman) who met regularly to explore the preternatural phenomena of animal magnetism. They made their explorations in cooperation with at least one similar group in Germany. She called the English group the "Orphic Circle" or "Orphic Brotherhood," to hide its real name. Its membership included such notables as John Varley (an artist and astrologer), Edward Bulwer-Lytton (a novelist), Richard James Morrison (otherwise the astrologer and almanac-maker "Zadkiel"), Richard F. Burton (the famous explorer and translator), and Marguerite, the Countess of Blessington.[53]

Meetings of the Orphic Circle are described in two remarkable books edited, privately printed and published in 1876 by Emma Hardinge Britten and her husband, William Britten.

The first of them was titled *Art Magic; or, Mundane, Sub-Mundane and Super-Mundane Spiritism: A Treatise in Three Parts and Twenty-Three Sections Descriptive of Art Magic, Spiritism, the Different Orders of Spirits in the Universe Known to be Related to, or in Communication with Man.*

The second had a shorter title: *Ghost Land; or, Researches into the Mysteries of Occultism: Illustrated in a Series of Autobiographical Sketches in Two Parts.*

Each book drew on the life and work of an enigmatic person, an old friend of Emma's, whom she calls Chevalier Louis de B— to conceal his true identity. He had been a member of the Orphic Circle in the days when Emma was one of its somnambulists, and he wrote to her about its meetings and his work as a participant.

These two books differ sufficiently in style, terminology and theoretical views from Hardinge Britten's own published works to make it certain that the mysterious Chevalier Louis was a real person, not merely a fiction invented by the editor to make the books more intriguing. It is also clear, from what she says about him, that he was not a man whose occult and esoteric interests could ever be publicly acknowledged, but must remain hidden even from most of his closer acquaintances. This prevents our identifying him with any person otherwise well known in the occult milieu of his own time.[54]

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[53] Mathiesen (2001), ch. 5; cf. Godwin (1994), chh. 9, 11. Cf. also Hardinge Britten (1887), 4.

[54] This is one of the principal reasons why I stand by my tentative identification of the Chevalier as Ernest Louis de Bunsen (Mathiesen 2001, pp. 26–32). (De Bunsen's father, two of his four brothers, and also his only surviving son, were important diplomats, some serving Prussia, others the United Kingdom. Thus it was crucial that the de Bunsen family maintained an appearance of irreproachable respectability.) If the Chevalier is not de Bunsen, he will be someone else wholly unknown to modern scholars of esotericism and occultism. Marc Demarest (2011), pp. xxxviii–xlvii, has argued that de Bunsen is not the author of *Art Magic,* but merely a useful fiction created by Hardinge Britten, who is the book's only author. I agree that the text of *Art Magic* issued from her pen, but not

In saying that Chevalier Louis was a real person, I am not claiming that these two books were written by him. It is clear that their finished texts came from the pen of Hardinge Britten, and that she relied very heavily on earlier works on esoteric and occult subjects by other published authors. In writing them, however, I maintain that she *also* drew on private correspondence between herself and the Chevalier, including an outline of the subjects that he thought she should treat in *Art Magic.*[55]

The meetings of the Orphic Circle, as described in the Chevalier's books, were held as a lodge with formal opening and closing rituals (like those of fraternal orders such as the Freemasons), but the Circle's principal work seems to have been carried out with the aid of four young somnambulists (of both sexes) stationed at the four sides of the lodge room, and provided with mirrors and gazing crystals at their stations.[56] These young people were put into trance, and in their trances they exchanged messages with similar circles on the European mainland, which also employed entranced somnambulists for the same purpose. They also communicated with various spiritual beings—not, however, with spirits of the dead, as did Spiritualists, for the members of the Orphic Circle did not suppose that there was any continuing form of human existence after death.

Emma Hardinge Britten
(Hardinge 1870, frontispiece)

Chevalier Louis de B—
(Olcott 1895, after p. 198)

that the Chevalier was a complete fiction. I maintain that his views informed not just *Art Magic,* but were reflected in some of her other works from 1860 onward.

[55] De B— (1876a), p. 7: "a hasty and fragmentary sketch of the work." Cf. Mathiesen (2001), ch. V, especially pp. 31–32.

[56] The young somnambulists of the Orphic Circle were called *lucides,* a term which I have only very rarely seen used elsewere in books by Spiritualists writing in English. *Lucides* was the term for magnetic somnambulists used by the French author Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet in his works (e.g., 1848–1851, 1850a*,* 1854). Two of his volumes were soon translated into English: one translation (Cahagnet 1850b) avoids the French term; the other (Cahagnet 1851) uses it freely. — On Cahagnet see now Hanegraaff (2016).

In addition to her work for the Orphic Circle, young Emma also found work on the public stage, first as a musician, then as an actress. ("Hardinge" was one of her stage names.) Her career on stage was not very successful, and so in 1855 she traveled to New York to find more lucrative venues for her theatrical talents. There, however, she encountered Spiritualism for the first time. Very soon she discovered a gift for trance mediumship, and was able to bid farewell to the theater for a new career as a Spiritualist medium and lecturer. (No doubt her previous work for the Orphic Circle had prepared her well for trance work.)

As a medium Emma Hardinge—she was not yet married to William Britten—attracted considerable notice, and soon she was more than able to support herself by her mediumship alone. Like some other mediums of that era, she went on tours as an entranced lecturer: hers was the voice and presence on stage, but the words she uttered were supposed to come from spirits who spoke through her. In 1865 an old friend, Benjamin Coleman, described her way of lecturing as follows:

> she speaks in what may be termed a semi-trance state, and ... she says she is guided and influenced in her speaking by spirits whom she recognizes. She speaks without preparation.[57]

From 1859 onward Hardinge published a number of her entranced lectures, which had been taken down in shorthand by someone in the audience.[58] Eventually she traveled back and forth between the United States and England in her capacity as a Spiritualist medium, lecturing in trance on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1865 she gave a series of seven such lectures in London, two of which addressed the same issues that George W. Samson and Allen Putnam had already broached a few years earlier. One of them was an extemporaneous answer to a request from the audience, "It has been alleged that modern Spiritualism is the witchcraft or necromancy referred to in the Old and New Testaments: will you be good enough to define the differences between them?"[59] The other lecture, two weeks later, returned to the same question, and was titled "On Ancient Magic and Modern Spiritualism."[60]

In the first of these lectures, Hardinge answered the proposed question by asserting that there was no substantive difference of any sort between witchcraft and necromancy, on the one hand, and on the other, miracle and religion. Each of these things rests equally on "magnetism and psychology, the two pillars which support the temple of Spiritualism"; by magnetism she means "the action of body upon body," and by psychology, "the action of mind upon mind."[61] By implication she allowed that a Spiritualist medium could also rightly be called a "witch," though she does not say it quite so baldly as that.

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[57] Hardinge (1866), p. 1.
[58] See Mathiesen (2001), appendix B, for a list of all her known stand-alone publications.
[59] Hardinge (1866), pp. 31–48.
[60] Hardinge (1866), pp. 69–88.
[61] Hardinge (1866), p. 45.

In the second of these two lectures Hardinge begins by mentioning "the occult powers of the human soul" that are inherent in every person. In ancient times, she says,

> magic was studied as a science and practiced as an art, although that art is now lost or is only regarded as the imposture of priestcraft, or a something synonymous with the unexplained phenomena of sorcery and witchcraft.[62]

In their practice of the art of magic the ancients deployed a number of aids, which she treats at some length: sound and music, action and motion, concentration and contemplation, narcotic or stimulant vapors, animal magnetism, and so forth.[63]

And then, she continues, spirit communication was achieved in the home of the Fox family in Hydesville *without any such complicated means;* and Spiritualism was born:

> The days of magic no more darken with Egyptian mysticism, but radiant with the light of a heavenly mission, return again to earth, and the powers of witchcraft, divested of their loathsomeness and evil, seem to revive in a flood of modern miracles, man's faith in an ever-present spiritual world.[64]

She goes on to state that

> Here at last is the key that unlocks the mystery of prophetic power, which of old was not always of the priest; the priests were not necessarily prophets; and it was because laymen discovered the power which resided in them to cure the sick, and to perform signs and miracles, that priests in the middle ages determined that all of miracle which was not performed within the pale of the church was witchcraft.[65]

And so she offers her hearers, through Spiritualism, a magic freed from needless rites and mysticism, and a witchcraft stripped of its loathsome and evil reputation.

Toward the end of her life, Hardinge Britten set out to write her autobiography, though she was no longer up to the task of finishing it within the span of her remaining years. In the year after her death, her sister, Margaret Wilkinson, edited and published what she had been able to complete. In it Hardinge Britten's own account of her childhood begins as follows:

> Cornelius Agrippa and other Mediæval Mystics have affirmed, that a Magician to attain to successful achievement "must be born a Magician."

[62] Hardinge (1866), p. 70.
[63] Hardinge (1866), PP. 70–76.
[64] Hardinge (1866), p. 81.
[65] Hardinge (1866), p. 82.

> Reviewing my own youthful experiences, I am perfectly convinced that this remark applies as surely to "Spirit Mediums" as to Magicians—indeed to my apprehension the two terms are synonymous.
>
> The Spiritual gifts that are normal to mediumistic individuals from birth may change and alter during earth life, but never wholly depart, and as this was happily my own case, and I was "born a witch," as some of my public opponents have informed the world, I have experienced many changes, though no actual loss of mediumistic unfoldment, throughout a long and busy career.[66]

Elsewhere in her *Autobiography* she reports two occasions when hostile people in the audience of one or another of her entranced lectures publicly denounced her as a witch.[67] There are other similar remarks about the identity of present-day Spiritualist mediums with the witches and magicians of past centuries scattered here and there in her two large histories of Spiritualism.[68]

Chevalier Louis de B—'s *Art Magic* also contains a few brief references to witches and witchcraft, as well as one telling comment:

> Magnetism is the pabulum by which spirits communicate, Psychology the influence. These are the secret virtues of Magic, Witchcraft and Mediumship in every age, and human nature changes not.[69]

It is clear that Hardinge Britten saw no essential differences between the Spiritualist mediums of her day and the magicians and witches of past centuries. In her eyes, a medium is the very same thing as a magician or a witch, just freed from unnecessary aids to trance-work.

3.5 J. J. Morse on Witchcraft

James Johnson Morse (1848–1919) was one of the more successful trance-lecturers of his time, able to command substantial fees for his work, and also quite active as an editor and writer for Spiritualist journals. In 1887 he spent a year in California, where among many other activities he gave a series of seven lectures which were published in the following year under the title, *Practical Occultism.* The fourth of these lectures treated of "Magic, Sorcery, and Witchcraft."[70] He takes the same position as Hardinge Britten, but attempts more forcibly to "clear away some proportion, at least, of the rubbish that has been associated with them," to rescue the words from the terrible associations they have in the minds of the ignorant:

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[66] Hardinge Britten (1900), p. 2
[67] Hardinge Britten (1900), pp. 77–78, 85.
[68] Hardinge (1870), pp. 9, 88, 157, 293, 552; Hardinge Britten (1883), pp. 8, 18, 367–370.
[69] De B— (1876a), p. 460; cf. pp. 140, 348, 409–410, 413.
[70] Morse (1888), pp. 70–88.

> all that can be done by the witch, the magician, or the sorcerer are possibilities to everyone else besides,—to the unfortunate so-called victim as well as to the seemingly so-called more fortunate masters.[71]

Addressing his audience of Spiritualists, he goes on to stress how their Spirit Circles are the same thing as the magic circles of past ages:

> In the formation of your spiritual circles you have all the elements that the magician has in the formation of his mystic circle; but you do not burn incense, you do not mix magical compounds and set fire to them, you do not draw a circle upon the ground and mark signs therein, you do not feel that you are going to draw up hell to administer to your evil needs, or make sprites, gnomes, or fairies obey you, or go out of the earthly life yourself, or call down the great ones of the world beyond and command them to be your ministers; but, instead, you feel you are forming a circle for the purpose of the evolution of spiritual phenomena. You are virtually and practically embodying and obeying all that magicians have been able to do in the past; and the real result of circle-holding, when scientifically attended to, is a reduction of the magic of antiquity to the orderly and lawful expression of spiritual phenomena in modern times,—neither more nor less.[72]

Turning more narrowly to witchcraft, Morse goes on to say:

> We come now to the question of witchcraft. You have been bewitched by a laughing eye, a merry voice, a twist of the hair, a turn of the face, a charming manner,—oh! by these you have been bewitched beyond all power to resist; a spell has been cast over you which you have felt for years afterward; and you have thanked God for such bedevilment,—for it brought you all the happiness you had in life!
>
> Here you have the secret of witchcraft,—the influence of one individual upon another. It may be laudable and good, or disgraceful and injurious; it may kindle into action the higher and better parts, or arouse all the lower and baser elements of you; may make you akin to the very angels themselves, or forge chains which shall bind you down to the lowest elements of sensuous life.
>
> Work out the problem on that line. All the witchery and bewitching resolves itself into psychological influences.[73]

These three Spiritualists may sufficiently illustrate the point I am making here, namely, that Spiritualists were sometimes accustomed to apply the word “witch” to themselves as mediums, and “witchcraft” to their spiritual work. I have not taken the trouble to multiply examples further, but I do not doubt that many more examples might be found.

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[71] Morse (1888), p. 70.
[72] Morse (1888), p. 75.
[73] Morse (1888), pp. 80 – 81.

This is the first intimation that Witchcraft is a religion in the United States, since it is claimed to be the same thing as Spiritualism, and Witches, that is, Spiritualist mediums, are officiants of that religion.

3.6 The Witch Board of 1886

As noted above (in section 2.1), by 1851 three methods had been devised by Spiritualists for receiving lengthy messages from spirits in their Spirit Circles. Two of them involved the use of an alphabet card. The third method employed what is now known as automatic writing, very often aided by the use of a simple device known as a planchette.

Eventually the two devices, the alphabet card and the planchette, were combined. This yielded the earliest form of what is now known as the ouija board. Messages from spirits could now be received not by automatic writing with a pencil or by the unsupported motion of a hand over an alphabet card, but by what might be called "automatic spelling": the fingers of the medium(s) rest on the planchette, which moves seemingly of itself and points to each successive letter of the incoming message.

The earliest known mentions of this combination both date from 1886, and they seem to be independent of one another. In this year, a newspaper in New York reported on a fad for using homemade devices of this sort in Ohio.[74] Also, in the same year an enterprising manufacturer in Leominster, Massachusetts, offered just such a device for sale under the significant name, "Witch Board." He also gained some publicity for his product by giving one of his new Witch Boards as a wedding present to President Grover Cleveland and his bride. President Cleveland, however, declined to test its powers.[75]

Spiritualists who cared to call themselves "witches," however cautiously, could now purchase a suitably named commercial tool to help them in their witchcraft, that is, their communications with spirits.

3.7 One Later Echo: Robert Frost's "The Witch of Coos"

Evidence that the identification of Spiritualist mediums with witches was not just the passing fancy of a few decades, but persisted down at least to the 1920s is provided—unexpectedly—by the New England poet Robert Frost (1874–1963). In the early 1920s he published two poems that had a witch as their protagonist: "The Pauper Witch of Grafton" (1921) and 'The Witch of Coos" (1922).

[74] Anonymous (1886a).
[75] Anonymous (1886b), Anonymous (1886c).

In the first of the poems, the witch speaks for herself, and she simply presents herself as a classic Old Witch, riding broomsticks all night, and riding men, too. But she is all too human in her love of causing trouble, and in the poem she is planning to cause trouble one last time in her poverty-stricken old age.

It is the second poem, however, which bears on our theme here. It begins:

> I staid the night for shelter at a farm
> Behind the mountain, with a mother and son,
> Two old-believers. They did all the talking.
>
> *Mother.* Folks think a witch who has familiar spirits
> She could call up to pass a winter evening,
> But won't, should be burned at the stake or something.
> Summoning spirits isn't "Button, button,
> Who's got the button," I would have them know.
>
> *Son.* Mother can make a common table rear
> And kick with two legs like an army mule.
>
> *Mother.* And when I've done it, what good have I done?
> Rather than tip a table for you, let me
> Tell you what Ralle the Sioux Control once told me.
> He said the dead had souls, but when I asked him
> How could that be – I thought the dead were souls,
> He broke my trance. Don't that make you suspicious
> That there's something the dead are keeping back?
> Yes, there's something the dead are keeping back.

Though the mother considers herself a witch, her doings are those of a Spiritualist medium: table-tipping and entranced communication.[76]

In the rest of the poem the mother tells of the ghostly skeleton of a man—apparently a peddler—whom she and her late husband once murdered and buried in their cellar.[77]

So as late as 1922 a poet could assume, at least in New England, that his readers would be familiar with Spiritualism, and would also know that some Spiritualist mediums thought of themselves as witches.

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[76] In Spiritualism, a "Control" is a spirit who serves the medium as a facilitator of her communications with other spirits and who can summon them for her.

[77] Frost (1922); Frost (1923), pp. 56–61. He had evidently heard the story of how Spiritualism began in 1848 in Hydesville, with communications from the ghost of a murdered peddler who had been buried in the cellar of the house where the Fox family was living.

Section 4

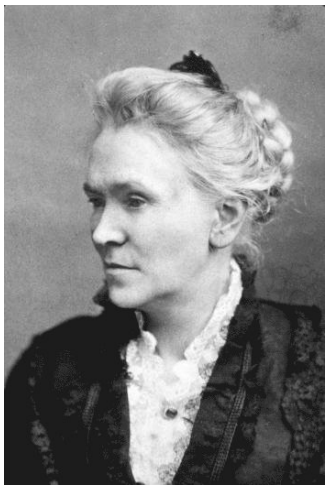
First-Wave Feminism and Witchcraft in the Nineteenth Century

4.1. The Beginning of the Woman's Rights Movement

The year 1848 witnessed not only the birth of Spiritualism as a religion, but also the beginning of an organized Woman's Rights movement in the United States. In that year, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and a number of her friends arranged for a convention to be held in Seneca Falls, New York, for two days in July. Seneca Falls and Hydesville were less than 25 miles distant from one another, so it is no surprise that a considerable number of people were involved in both movements, Spiritualism and Woman's Rights, from their beginnings.[78] Both movements, each in its own sphere, offered a radical challenge to the old established order of society, which had long been upheld by Church and State alike.

To achieve its political goals, the Woman's Rights movement had to appeal to a wide range of women and men alike, so its most radical supporters were soon relegated to its margins. Two of the most radical of these women, however, contributed significantly to the history we are exploring here. They were Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton
(Tilton 1868, facing p. 332)



Matilda Joslyn Gage
(Wikipedia)

[78] For example, Eliab W. Capron, and Isaac and Amy Post, to name just a few. See Powalski (2007) on the Posts. Braude (1989) treats the alliance between Spiritualism and first-wave feminism in the 1800s in considerable depth; she also notes (p. 81) the nearly complete exclusion of Spiritualists from the usual histories of first-wave feminism. In the new introduction to the second edition of her book (2001, pp. xv–xxvii), Braude goes into the reasons for this deliberate exclusion at some length.

Both women were Freethinkers, who waxed eloquent on the subject of the established Christian Church as one of the principal oppressors of women.[79] Both, too, were interested in unconventional religions and occult movements, such as Spiritualism and Theosophy.[80] These interests placed them on the outermost fringes of the mass of women who fought for women's rights.

4.2. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and The Woman's Bible

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) was the somewhat more moderate and circumspect of those two women. Though she had long been a Freethinker, and had sampled Spiritualism and Theosophy, she was also a close personal friend of Susan B. Anthony's, and so she was never pushed quite so far to the margins of the Woman's Rights movement as was Gage. Also, it was only toward the very end of her long life that Stanton made her Freethinker's criticism of Christianity widely known, with the publication of the two volumes of *The Woman's Bible* in 1895 and 1898. This was a cooperative work, with contributions by ten other women, including Gage, though most of the commentary was written by Stanton.[81] It critically examines many of the Biblical passages usually cited in support of the subordination of women to men, and argues strongly against that interpretation, showing how ancient unacknowledged presuppositions and prejudices lie behind it.[82]

The authors of *The Woman's Bible* also mentioned a recent translation of the entire Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek that had been made by a fellow feminist, Julia Evalina Smith, and published in 1876—the only translation of the entire Bible into English made by a learned woman working wholly on her own.[83]

The first volume of *The Woman's Bible* covers only the Pentateuch, that is, the first five books of the Old Testament, and by far the largest part of the commentaries on its selected passages were written by Stanton herself. The second volume runs through the rest of the Bible, but it comments only on a few passages from just some of the Bible's remaining books.

The women who contributed to *The Woman's Bible* were well aware that recent scholarship had overthrown the old orthodox belief that the entire Bible, the Old Testament in Hebrew and

[79] Freethinkers (so called at the time) were people who rejected the claims of revealed religion, and in particular, of Christianity. For the organized Freethought movement see now Jacoby (2004).
[80] Godwin (2015), ch. 20.
[81] See Stanton (1895–1898), vol. I, p. 4; vol. II, p. 4, for the names of these ten women. A very few pages were written by a twelfth person who needed to remain anonymous, and who may have been an ordained minister (and a man): Stanton (1895–1898), vol. II, pp. 114–115, 143–144, 156–157, 209–211. For extensive background on these ten women, see Kern (2001), pp. 135–171. Faxneld (2017), pp. 134–135, notes that at least four of these women were keen students of H. P. Blavatsky's works; in addition to Stanton and Gage, they included Frances Lord and Frances Ellen Burr. On *The Woman's Bible* in general, see now Mace (2009) and Larsen (2017).
[82] For Stanton, see now also Faxneld (2017), pp. 133–142.
[83] Stanton (1895–1898), vol. I, pp. 149–152, about Smith's translation of the Bible (Smith 1876). See also Stern (1977).

the New Testament in Greek, was the very dictated Word of God. Rather, it was the product of long centuries of human effort, writing, compiling and revising many texts of various origins.

In particular, they knew that the account of creation in the Book of Genesis had been woven together from two earlier accounts, which differed the one from the other in their details—and they also knew that each account described the creation of men and women in a different way. In chapter 1 of Genesis, men and women were said to have been created together at the same time, and both of them created in the image of God. Yet in chapter 2 of the same book, man was said to have been created first from the dust of the ground, and woman created only some time later from a rib-bone of that man. The difference between the two accounts has obvious implications for woman's rights, which Stanton's commentary emphasized.[84]

To cite a second example of *The Woman's Bible's* feminist commentary, Stanton also examined a much less familiar passage from the Second Book of Kings, chapter 22. This passage mentions a woman, Huldah the Prophetess, who was a member of "the college" in Jerusalem. It tells how only she—and by implication no man!—knew how to decide whether a "Book of the Law," a scroll that had just been discovered in the Temple, was the word of God or not. So much, Stanton comments, for the notion that women should be debarred from a college education! "People who talk the most of what the Bible teaches, often know the least about its contents," she remarks.[85]

Remarkably, the second volume of *The Woman's Bible* also devotes seven pages to a discussion of "The Kabbalah" by Frances Ellen Burr (1831–1923). It opens with the words,

> The Bible is an occult book, and a remarkable one. About all creeds and faiths this side of Pagandom go to it for their authority. Read in the light of occult teachings, it becomes something more than the old battleground of controversy for warring religions. Occultism alone furnishes the key to this ancient treasury of wisdom.[86]

This chapter takes S. L. MacGregor Mathers' *The Kabbalah Unveiled,* published in 1887, as its main source. It quotes from his preface, where he writes,

> I wish particularly to direct the reader's attention to the stress laid by the Kabbalah on the feminine aspects of the Deity, and to the shameful way in which any allusion to these has been suppressed in the ordinary translations of the Bible, also to the Kabbalistical equality of male and female.[87]

[84] Stanton (1895–1898), vol. I, pp. 14–21, cf. 34.
[85] Stanton (1895–1898), vol. II, pp. 81–83.
[86] Stanton (1895–1898), vol. II, p. 106.
[87] Stanton (1895–1898), vol. II, pp. 106–107, citing Mathers (1887), p. viii.

The words "witch" and "witchcraft" occur but rarely in *The Woman's Bible.*[88] When they do, they are always in the commentaries by Stanton. Though her remarks are brief, her view of witches seems close to that of Gage's (to which we shall turn in a moment). Of some interest is Stanton's remark that "the Church condemns prestidigitators, soothsayers, fortune tellers, Spiritualists, witches, and the assumptions of Christian Scientists"—a revealing juxtaposition with her contemporaries, Spiritualists and Christian Scientists, which hints that some women of her day had even begun to call themselves "witches."[89]

4.3 Matilda Joslyn Gage on Witches

Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826–1898) was one of the three authors and compilers, together with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, of the first volume of the renowned *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881).[90] That volume included, as its last chapter, an essay by Gage with the title, "Woman, Church, and State."[91] It was meant as a summary of her forthcoming book with the same title.

Twelve years later, in 1893, when she finally published that book, it had grown into a volume of more than 500 pages, chronicling at great length and in horrifying detail many long centuries of misogyny and persecution, which were fostered chiefly, in her view, by institutional Christianity from late Antiquity onward. It is a bleak picture that she paints of appalling cruelty toward women, and particularly toward any woman who dared to be less than totally submissive to men, who strove to be a person in her own right, not just some man's piece of property.

In the meantime, in 1885 Gage had joined the Rochester Lodge of the Theosophical Society, which at that time was the only active lodge of that society anywhere in the United States. She had been sponsored for membership by another very radical Feminist, Josephine Cables (later, Josephine Cables Aldrich).[92] Like Cables, Gage had a wide interest in esoteric and occult matters. In her *Woman, Church and State,* she cited not only H. P. Blavatsky and her Theosophical journal *Lucifer*, but also Anna Bonus Kingsford—whose Hermetic Society competed for a while with the Theosophical Society for influence among English-speaking occultists—as well as a French magician and writer on magic, Eliphas Levi (the pseudonym of Alphonse Louis Constant).

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[88] See Stanton (1895–1898), vol. I, pp. 79–80, 93–95, 99–100, 134–136; vol. II, pp. 11–14, 44–50, 71–74. Those words also occur in two of the letters from others printed at the end of vol. II, pp. 203–208 (from Josephine K. Henry), 211–212 (from Catharine A. F. Stebbins).

[89] Stanton (1895–1898), vol. II, p. 13.

[90] Wagner (1998) provides an excellent brief overview of Gage's life and work. On Gage and witchcraft see also Corey (2003), Gibson (2007), pp. 112–119, and Faxneld (2017), pp. 215–221.

[91] Gage (1881). The first two chapters of that volume were also written by her: cf. the footnote on p. 38 and Brammer (2000), p. 111.

[92] Algeo (1986), p. 271. For Cables/Aldrich see Willard & Livermore (1893), p. 16, and pp. 309–310 for Gage.

Cables, moreover, had also been a member of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor for a while, which—in sharp contast to the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Society—offered its members practical instruction in magic and occultism.[93] It is quite likely, though it has not yet been documented, that Gage had followed Cables into the Hermetic Brotherhood, too. In any event, the Brotherhood, which had announced its existence only in 1884, foundered and sank during the second half of 1886, once it became common knowledge in the United States that one of its two heads, Thomas H. Burgoyne (born as Thomas Dalton), had a criminal past. After that unwelcome news, former members of the Brotherhood thought it wiser to seek occult wisdom elsewhere.

It is not surprising, therefore, that clear traces of Theosophy and Occultism can be found throughout Gage's book. In fact, they are equally prominent in her contributions to Stanton's *The Woman's Bible.*

In her book Gage devotes an entire chapter to the persecution of women for witchcraft by both Church and State.[94] Here she states that "the word *witch* formerly signified a woman of superior knowledge," though she does not actually cite the "vast amount of evidence" that she says supports her claim.[95]

The superior knowledge of those witch-women, according to Gage, included not only the arts of herbs and healing, but also the art of magic. For her, however, "magic simply means knowledge of the effect of certain natural, but generally unknown laws." ..... "All modern investigations tend to prove what was called witchcraft, to have been in most instances the action of psychic laws not yet fully understood."[96] "What was termed magic, among men, was called witchcraft in woman."[97]

In positing such "psychic laws not yet fully understood," Gage is, of course, repeating the claims made decades earlier by animal-magnetizers and Spiritualist mediums, which we documented in sections 2 and 3 of this book.

The men who accused women (and rarely also accused other men, as Gage acknowledges) of the crime of witchcraft were motivated, of course, by much more than mere misogyny. An accusation of witchcraft was a tool widely used "for the enrichment of the church; for the advancement of political schemes; and for the gratification of private malice."[98] So useful were

[93] Godwin (1994), ch. 16; Godwin, Chanel & Deveney (1995), pp. 7, 87, 196, 214, 310, 347, 402; Godwin (2015), pp. 210–215.
[94] Gage (1893), ch. V (pp. 217–294).
[95] Gage (1893), p. 236. Here she is probably relying on Blavatsky (1877), I, 354–356, who makes the same claim. Before them, similar claims were made by Jacob Grimm in his *Teutonic Mythology* (1882–1888), chh. 16, 33–34.
[96] Gage (1893), p. 234–235.
[97] Gage (1893), p. 251.
[98] Gage (1893), p. 254.

these tools that "it is computed from records that nine millions of persons were put to death for witchcraft after 1484. ..... The greater number of this incredible multitude were women."[99]

Gage's treatment of women accused of witchcraft also drew on a very influential volume by Jules Michelet, which had become available in somewhat bowdlerized English translation in 1863: *La Sorcière: The Witch of the Middle Ages.*[100] From Michelet she took her reconstruction of the transgressive rites practiced at night by oppressed women during the Middle Ages. In these gatherings of women, as Gage imagined it,

> the rites of the church were travestied in solemn mockery, and defiance cast at that heaven which permitted the priest and the lord alike to trample upon all the sacred rights of women. During this mocking service a true sacrifice of wheat was offered to the "Spirit of the Earth" who made wheat to grow, and loosened birds bore aloft to the "God of Freedom" the sighs and prayers of the serfs asking that their descendants might be free. We can but regard this sacrifice as the most acceptable offering made in that day of moral degradation; a sacrifice and a prayer more holy than all the ceremonials of the church. This service where woman by virtue of her greater despair acted both as altar and priest, opened with the following address and prayer. "I will come before Thine altar, but save me, O, Lord, from the faithless and violent man!" (from the priest and the baron.) ..... Without her [woman], no man was admitted to this celebration, which took place in the seclusion of the forest and under the utmost secrecy. Offerings were made to the latest dead and the most newly born of the district, and defiance hurled against that God to whose injustice the church had taught woman that all her wrongs were due. ..... Woman's knowledge of herbs was made use of in a preparation of Solanae which mixed with mead, beer, cider, or farcy—the strong drink of the west—disposed the oppressed serfs to joyous dancing and partial forgetfulness of their wrongs during these popular night gatherings of the Sabbath.[101]

4.4 The Witches of Oz

Lyman Frank Baum is very well known for his children's book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), and for its thirteen sequels published in the course the next twenty years. He is much less well known as a son-in-law to Matilda Joslyn Gage, the husband of her youngest daughter, Maud, whom he had married in 1882.[102]

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[99] Gage (1893), p. 247.

[100] Michelet (1863); the French original had been published only the year before, in 1862. For Michelet's impact on early feminism see now Shen (2008).

[101] Gage (1893), pp. 257–259, based on Michelet (1863), book I, ch. 7.

[102] Godwin (2015), ch. 21.

Following Gage's example, Frank and Maud Baum joined the Theosophical Society in 1892. Because the Baums were living in Chicago at the time, they joined a lodge of the Society in that city, the Ramayana Lodge, under the sponsorship of the noted occultist William P. Phelon and his wife.[103] According to their son, Baum was selective in accepting only some of the Society's teachings, not all of them.[104] Even so, Theosophical concepts show up here and there in his fourteen Oz books.

Maud Baum and her mother were very close all their lives, with the result that Gage would alternate between living in her own house in Fayettesville, New York, and living with the Baums in their houses, first in Aberdeen, North Dakota, and later in Chicago. Thus there were many opportunities for the three of them to discuss at length not only Spiritualism, Theosophy and occultism, but also a wide range of shared interests, both esoteric and political.

What is particularly significant for our argument is the role that witches play in the fourteen Oz books that Baum wrote, and the character that he gives them. In the first of these books, the Land of Oz was home to four powerful witch-women, each ruling one of the four quarters into which Oz was divided. The Witches of the East and of the West were wicked witches, but those of the South and of the North were good witches. There is also a wizard, Oz, who lives in the Emerald City at the center of the Land. However, he, a man, is merely an illusionist and a humbug. Unlike the four witches, he has no true magical power of his own. Apart from the wizard, the Land of Oz is ruled by powerful women, and life there is rather utopian.

Glinda, the Good Witch of the South
(Baum 1900, facing p. 254.)

[103] W. P. Phelon was also the author of a short occult novel for adults, *A Witch of the Nineteenth Century,* published in 1893, just a few years before Baum began writing the first of his Oz books.
[104] Algeo (1968), p. 271. See also Koupal (2000), pp. 62–80.

At the beginning of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,* the young protagonist, Dorothy, is blown to Oz by a cyclone that had picked up her house in Kansas and whirled it far away through the air. Once the cyclone had spent its force, it dropped Dorothy's house into Oz, where it landed right on top of the wicked Witch of the East and killed her. Shortly thereafter the good Witch of the North showed up to see what had happened, and she also helped Dorothy get started on her quest to return home. By the tale's end Dorothy had also put an end to the wicked Witch of the West, and had met Glinda, the good Witch of the South, who was the wisest and most powerful of the four witches. It was Glinda who showed Dorothy a magical way to return to her family in Kansas.

Glinda is a major character throughout Baum's fourteen Oz books, and the last of the fourteen, *Glinda of Oz* (published in 1920), even takes its title from her.

All of Baum's Oz books were enormously popular, and they have remained in print from his day to ours. They gave generations of children in the United States their first concept of witches. It was Baum's good, wise, kind, beautiful and very powerful Glinda who would form their earliest concept of the witch and her magic for more than a century. They would carry this concept into their adult years, where it would influence the further course of the history we are tracing here.[105]

[105] Cf. Gibson (2007), pp. 138–140.

Section 5

The Magic and Witchcraft of Charles Godfrey Leland

5.1 Leland, the Man Himself

Charles Godfrey Leland (1824–1903) was one of those men who seems to be larger than life with his many interests and adventures. Born into comfortable circumstances in Philadelphia, and educated at Princeton University among the sons of the elite, he might have been expected to settle into a humdrum mundane existence. However, his restless, romantic temperament decreed otherwise. After college he went to Europe for advanced studies at some of the universities of Germany, but also for adventures. After he returned home, he settled into an early career as a journalist and a writer.[106]

Charles Godfrey Leland
(Pennell, 1906, I, frontispiece)

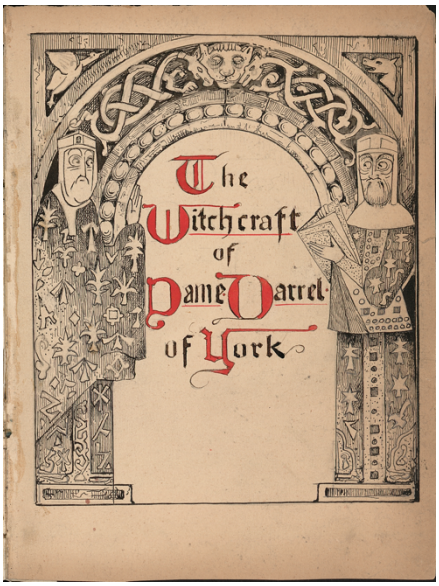
Leland had always had a facile pen, and also a knack for learning new languages—and not just written languages like German, French and Italian, but also languages of peoples who had no tradition of writing at all. He became fluent in the tongue of the Roma (whom he called, as did his era, "Gypsies"), and learned a bit of Shelta, the language of wandering tinkers in Britain. And he took immense pleasure in the company of these "people of the road," and others like them.

[106] Jackson (1925–1927) is the fullest bibliography available of Leland's very many publications.

And so it was natural enough for Leland to segue into ethnography and folklore. Not hindered by the strictures that constrained academic scholarship, he authored many popular books and even more articles on these and other subjects. His romantic temperament drew him to focus on the legends and lore of the people about whom he wrote—and especially on their magical practices.

Ever since his childhood Leland had been attracted to the romance of witchcraft and witches. He wrote a number of poems about them: an unpublished volume of his own *Witch Ballads* is among his papers in the library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In several of his books he cites a single line from a poem (presumably one of his own unpublished poems, since he never identifies an author for it): "For every woman is at heart a witch."[107]

That library also has a vellum-bound illustrated handwritten book from his pen titled *The Witchcraft of Dame Darrel of York.*[108] It is a catalog of weird and wonderful magical creatures, such as Elves, Goblins, Dwergs, Thurses, Yeth-Hounds, and so forth, together with magic spells for gaining their help in the travails of life—in short, an extensive folkloric grimoire.



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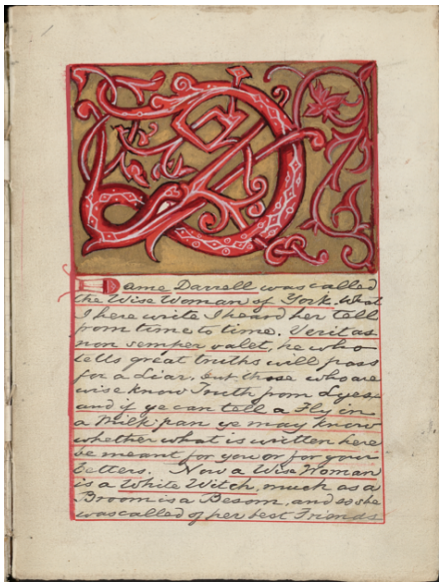
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Moreover, Leland's own personal religious views were unconventional and unorthodox, a form of mystical nature religion.[109] So no religious scruples kept him from experimenting with magic, including the magic that he had discovered in the course of his ethnographic research, and he found that it often worked, or seemed to work. He wondered how that could be, and so he devised a plausible, non-supernatural theory to account for its effectiveness, whether actually true or just seemingly so. (See section 5.3 below.)

[107] Leland (1891), p. 233; Leland (1899), p. 114; Leland (1904), p. 75.
[108] Historical Society of Pennsylvania (1949), entry no. 363. *The Witchcraft of Dame Darrel of York* is now available in facsimile and transcription (Mathiesen 2011).
[109] Pennell (1905), 156; Pennell (1906), II, 46-51. Cf. Mathiesen (2011), pp. iv–v.

During the last years of his life, Leland and his wife lived in Italy, in the city of Florence, where—to his great delight—he found several Italian fortune-tellers and women who called themselves Witches (*streghe*). He avidly collected and studied their magic lore, and he enjoyed practicing it himself. In her biography of him, his niece, Elizabeth Robins Pennell, writes,

> He lived in witchcraft, as he had lived in Romany years before. ..... I do not think anything in his life absorbed, enthralled him as did the witches of Florence.[110]

In the decade from 1891 to 1900 Leland poured all of these things in which he delighted—his ethnographic and folkloric research, and also his own theory of magic—into a series of books which were widely read in their day, and (to judge by their twentieth-century reprints) are still read by many even now. It is these books of his that command our attention as we look into the early history of Witchcraft as a religion in the United States.[111]

5.2 Leland's Five Books on Romany and Italian Magic and Witchcraft

The first of these books by Leland appeared in 1891, with the title *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-Telling.* It is essentially a loosely organized compilation of everything of interest that he had collected on the stated subjects during his many years of adventuring among the Roma, interspersed with parts of his developing theory of how magic can be made to work—or at least, appear to work—by skillful magicians.

The same is largely true of Leland's second compilation, published in 1892 with the title *Etruscan Roman Remains.* Here, however, there is less theorizing about magic, and more about witchcraft.

In Florence, where he and his wife had settled in the winter of 1888, Leland chanced to meet a woman whom he called "Maddalena," a fortune-teller and spell-caster who actually called herself a *strega*, a "Witch," and said that her religion was not the usual Roman Catholicism of Italy, but *la vecchia religione,* "the old religion," of Witchcraft.[112] As it turned out, this religion of hers was a practice full of spirits and disembodied powers who—to Leland's astonishment—actually bore the names of the ancient deities of the Etruscans, old even when Rome was still young. He was astonished and delighted by this, and he began to learn from her everything she could tell him about her religion and her magic at first hand, or at second hand from her fellow *streghe,* who held to the same old religion. This book was Leland's first effort to confirm the authenticity of what Maddalena had to tell him.

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[110] Pennell (1906), II, p. 311.

[111] See now Wood (2008).

[112] Leland always called her Maddalena. Her real name was Margherita Taluti (Mathiesen 2011, p. iii).

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Maddelena
(Pennell 1906, II, facing p. 310)

Leland then published two other books of Italian folklore which are collections, not of witch-lore *per se,* but of legends and folk tales that turn on magic and witchcraft. They are *Legends of Florence, Collected from the People* (2 vols., 1894–1895), and *The Unpublished Legends of Virgil* (1900). Many of the legends in them were collected from Maddalena, and many of the others from a second informant, a woman named Marietta Pery.

In the fifth of these books Leland returns to the witches of Florence and their "old religion." This book is his much-cited *Aradia, or The Gospel of the Witches of Italy* (1899). Like Leland's other books on Italian witch lore, *Aradia* is a collection of raw materials given in translation, with Leland's own extensive commentary.[113]

Aradia has been the object of considerable controversy among scholars, some of whom have thought it a product of Leland's fantasy alone. I have written elsewhere about the worth of this book: after examining Leland's own handwritten copy of the text that he had carefully prepared for his printers, I am certain that *Aradia,* like Leland's other works, rests on a short document written by Maddalena, which is translated in chapters I, II, and the first half of IV only. A significant fraction of the rest of the texts in the book were straight-forward reprints of texts that he had already collected from Maddalena and published in his earlier books on her Witch-lore.[114]

Aradia was published in 1899, but it attracted little notice and was very soon forgotten. Only two contemporary reviews of it seem ever to have been published.[115] By chance, about thirty years later, a copy of the book fell into the hands of a popular American writer, Theda Kenyon,

[113] On *Aradia* see Gibson (2007), pp. 142–149, Faxneld (2017), pp. 221–229.
[114] Mathiesen (1998). See also Magliocco (1999, 2002, 2009).
[115] [Anonymous], *Folk-Lore,* 11 (1900), 309; H. Hubert, *Revue de l'histoire des religions,* 46 (1902), 104–106.

who drew on it it throughout her sensationalist book, *Witches Still Live* (see section 6.4).[116] I have found no other notice of *Aradia* in print before the early 1960s, when it was reprinted in a small edition by Dumblecott Magic Productions, the private business of an early English Wiccan, Charles Cardell.[117]

Aradia had, however, been quietly read by others before that time, at least in England, for there are clear echoes of it in the oath-bound texts that Gerald B. Gardner handed down to his initiates into the hidden counter-religion that he was publicizing. Whether it was Gardner himself who had read *Aradia*, or some earlier Wiccan just a few years before him, is not entirely clear. What is clear is that it had been read by at least one person among "The Wica" (as Gardner called the group of initiated Witches who followed that religion).

5.3 Leland's Theory of Magic

As noted above, Leland eventually elaborated his own theory of how magic could be made to work. He developed that theory slowly over the course of the last decade or so of his life. Part of it he published in 1891 in *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-Telling.*[118]

He presented more of it in 1899 in a book that was titled *Have You a Strong Will?: or, How to Develop and Strengthen Will-power, Memory, or Any Other Faculty or Attribute of the Mind, by the Easy Process of Self-hypnotism.* During Leland's lifetime two more editions of it appeared in 1902 and 1903, each revised from the preceeding one. All three of these editions were published in England, as were four further editions after Leland's death. Clearly it had attracted a significant readership in that country.

In 1907 there also appeared an edition of this book published in the United States under a different title, *The Mystic Will: A Method of Developing and Strengthening the Faculties of the Mind, Through the Awakened Will, by a Simple, Scientific Process Possible to Any Person of Ordinary Intelligence.*[119] Significantly enough, it was published by William Walker Atkinson in Chicago, and 1907 was also the year in which Atkinson published his own two books on what he was then calling mental magic: *The Secret of Mental Magic: A Course of Seven Lessons* and *Mental Fascination.* (See section 2.5 above.) Clearly Leland's book had an influence on Atkinson's own developing theories.

Leland's theory is complex, and need not be summarized here, but its essence is that the mind has many strange powers of which it is not consciously aware.[120] By a program of simple

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[116] Kenyon (1929), chh. 1–4, 10, 12, 14–15.
[117] There is a copy of this reprint in the library of The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic at Bocastle, Cornwall. I know of no other copy in any library or archive. There have been many later reprints from 1968 onward. (For Cardell see section 9.1.)
[118] Leland (1891), chh. XI–XII.
[119] Leland (1907).
[120] See Mathiesen (2011), pp. vii–xii, for a more detailed summary.

exercises one can progress from one level of mastery to the next, and eventually achieve a much greater conscious command of all one's mental faculties. Many aspects of this control will appear to be magical to those who do not understand how it has been developed.

One aspect of Leland's theory of magic is that every person contains a multitude of distinct "selves," including a dream-self, which manifests while the waking self is asleep, and possibly others as well. These two selves have different abilities and powers, some of which bear on his theory of magic.

Leland further developed his idea of alternate selves in a work that was published in 1904, right after his death, *The Alternate Sex, or The Female Intellect in Man and the Masculine in Woman.* Though his terminology is fluid, these alternate sexes or intellects function as alternate selves in every person.

5.4 Witchcraft as a Counter-Religion

The most interesting thing in Leland's *Aradia* is his use of the uncommon term *counter-religion* to characterize what Maddalena called her "old religion" (*vecchia religione*).[121] Leland's use of that term anticipates the much later term *counter-culture,* which was popularized in 1969 by Theodore Roszak, and has much the same force. Roszak's term (*counter-culture*) refers to any subculture formed in principled opposition to the mainstream culture of the society to which it belongs.[122] Maddalena's "old religion," according to Leland, stood in just such a principled opposition to the Roman Catholicism of Italy in her day.

Although there seems to be no evidence that Leland had ever read Matilda Joslyn Gage's book, *Women, Church and State,* he had read Michelet's *La Sorciere: The Witch of the Middle Ages* by 1892 at the latest, and probably much earlier.[123] On the evidence of his later books and also his niece's biography of him (Pennell 1906), he shared Michelet's (and Gage's) general views on the centuries-long oppression of women by Church and State, and he presented Maddalena's "old religion" as a force of resistance against that oppression, as a religion of rebellion and revolution.

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[121] Leland (1899), p. x. [The term "counter-religion" is much older than Leland; the earliest use of it that I have found so far—using **books.google.com**—comes from 1692. But in these older contexts it is always used to condemn some form of institutional religion which differs from that of the writer, with overtones of heresy. There is no hint of condemnation in Leland's use of the term.]

[122] Roszak (1969), p. 45: a "counter culture" is "a culture so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks to many as a culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of a barbaric intrusion."

[123] Michelet is cited in Leland (1892), p. 98.

Section 6

Fashionable Witches, Young and Pretty

6.1 New Schools for Teaching Witchcraft

Toward the end of the the year 1899 a curious notice appeared in *The San Francisco Call* under the heading "Witchcraft School in Paris." This new school, it announced, will offer "a complete course of sorcery and witchcraft, of astrology and the other hermetic 'sciences'" to interested students. The *Call* was just reprinting a similar announcement that had been published a few weeks earlier in British newspapers.[124] No doubt the *Call* simply thought such an item of news would intrigue its readers sufficiently to boost the paper's revenue. But it was probably not unaware of several new, related cultural trends in the United States.

The original British article, printed in *The Pall Mall Gazette,* includes as its final sentence the names of the men who will teach the courses: Monsieurs Barlet, Papus and Sedir. These three men were possibly the most well known French occultists of their day.[125] Any school of occultism conducted by them could be relied on to treat occult subjects competently and thoroughly. (Most, but not all, of the British and American reprints of the article omit the final sentence with the three men's names.)

A few years later British papers reprinted a similar announcement: "Modern Witchcraft: A School for Prophetesses." This witchcraft school was in Berlin, and it was for ladies only. It offered its students instruction in many forms of divination, including palmistry. Its principal teacher was a woman whose name is not given, at least not in the one English reprint I have seen of the announcement.[126]

Clearly witchcraft and occultism had become to some degree fashionable in the decades around 1900.

These two witchcraft schools, however, were in Europe. For the cultural trends that made the announcement of interest in the United States we need to look elsewhere. By 1899 witchcraft had already become fashionable here.

[124] Anonymous (1899).
[125] All three names are pseudonyms. François-Charles Barlet was Albert Faucheux (1838–1921), Papus was Gérard Encausse (1865–1916), and Paul Sedir was Yvon Le Loup (1871–1926).
[126] Anonymous (1907).

6.2 Playing at Witches on Hallowe'en

By the late 1880s unmarried young ladies had begun to give fashionable Hallowe'en parties for their friends, where they could also play at being witches and telling fortunes. Newspapers and magazines printed articles describing these parties and the witchy games that were played at them.[127] Some of these games were traditional means of fortune-telling, presented as curious rustic customs by the long-ago poets John Gay ("The Shepherd's Week," first published in 1714) and Robert Burns ("Halloween," first published in 1786), which were now being revived as party entertainments. Others may have been new creations, mostly from the pen of the prolific newspaper columnist, Geoffrey Williston Christine, who was the author of a newspaper column on Hallowe'en and its rituals that was published in a number of newspapers in the years between 1888 and 1891.[128]

Not long thereafter, the first small handbook for giving successful Hallowe'en parties of this sort was published in 1898. It was titled *Hallowe'en: Its Origin and How to Celebrate it with Appropriate Games and Ceremonies,* and it was only 44 pages long. It was written by Martha Russell Orne, who otherwise is known only as the author of a few plays and a school-book on grammar. Her booklet opens with a few pages on the history of the festival, suggestions for party decor and activities, and sample invitations to the party. ("Invite only unmarried friends; married couples are rather *de trop* on such occasions.") Most of the book, however, gives directions for playing fortune-telling and spell-casting games during the party. It describes more than forty such games, including a few from Christine's Hallowe'en newspaper column.

Orne's book remained in print for several decades, well into the 1930s if not later.[129] By the end of the 1930s, however, about thirty similar thin books of fortune-telling games for Hallowe'en parties had been published. Many of them were soft-cover ephemera, but some were a little more substantial. Perhaps the most widely circulated of them was Mary E. Blain's *Games for Hallowe'en,* first published in 1912 and sold in a hard cover.[130]

To their number we can add one substantial book of the same general sort. *The Book of Hallowe'en,* was published in 1919; it was written by a librarian at the Lynn (Massachusetts) Public Library, Ruth Edna Kelley. It is a volume of about 200 pages on the origin of Hallowe'en and the ways it has been celebrated by the Celts, in the British Isles, and in Germany; it ends with a chapter on how Hallowe'en is currently celebrated in various parts of the United States. The author remarks tellingly,

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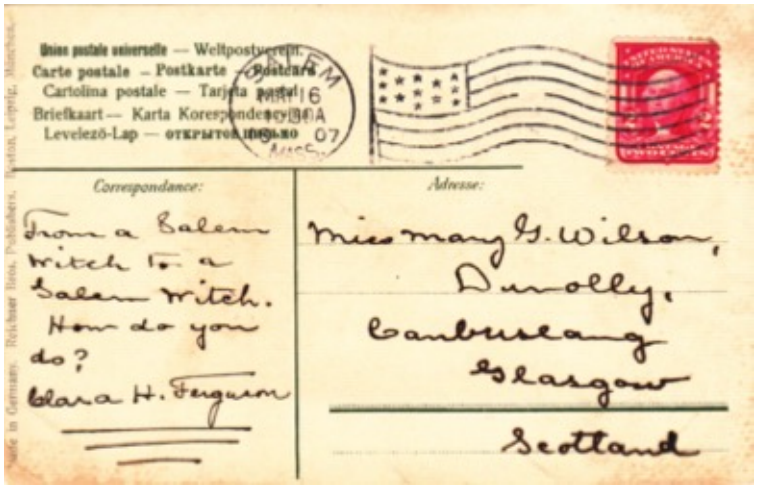
[127] For these parties see especially Arkins (2000, 2004). Hasbrook (1907) gives a typical account of such a party.
[128] Christine (1890).
[129] Editions from the 1930s have four additional pages at the end, including instructions on how to tell fortunes from a tea or coffee cup.
[130] Blain (1912). "Blain" is a pseudonym; the author was Mary E. Barse, wife of one of the publishers.

> While the original customs of Hallowe'en are being forgotten more and more across the ocean, Americans have fostered them, and are making this an occasion something like it must have been in its best days overseas. [131]

As Kelley says, young adults were holding Hallowe'en parties all over the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. These parties might sometimes even be costume parties, where the guests could dress up as characters from Hallowe'en lore: witches and wizards, ghosts, skeletons, scarecrows, and so forth. The principal themes for costumes in those days were witchcraft and magic, the harvest season with scarecrows, corn shocks and pumpkins, and on occasion such emblems of mortality as ghosts, skeletons and the grim reaper, Death itself.

The following postcard, from one young woman to another, may serve as a further example of playing as witches.[132] It was sent in 1907 from Salem, Massachusetts, and it reads, "From a Salem Witch to a Salem Witch. How do you do?"



6.3 Beautiful Women as Witches on Hallowe'en Postcards

One can get an excellent idea of what these parties were like from the Hallowe'en postcards of them which were published in great quantity during the years 1907–1914 (and a few during the years right after the end of World War I). The party scenes depicted on these cards show, for the most part, attractive young women and men dressed in very fashionable clothes, enjoying the sort of fortune-telling and spell-casting games described by Martha Russell Orne and Mary E. Blain.[133] Here are two examples that show women playing fortune-telling games at such parties:

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[131] Kelley (1919), p. 153.

[132] From the author's collection.

[133] All the illustrations of postcards in this book are taken from examples in the author's collection. See also the comprehensive catalog of Halloween postcards, Carpentier (2009), pp. 183 [Salem witch], 215 [example #1], 207 [ex. #2], 224 [ex. #3, artist: Clare Angell], 144 [ex. #4, artist: Dwig], 134 [ex. #5, artist: H. B. Griggs], 254 [ex. #6]. See also Gifford (2013).

Example #1
"Hallowe'en"

Example #2
"Your Hallowe'en Fortune"

Here are Mary E. Blain's descriptions of the two rituals (or games, if you will) shown in these two postcards.[134]

CELLAR STAIRS

Cellar-stairs' test is where a girl boldly goes downstairs backwards, holding a mirror, and trying to catch in it the features of him who would be her mate.

APPLE PARING

Each guest, receiving apple and knife, is requested to peel apple without breaking; then swing paring around head, and let it drop to floor. The letter formed is initial of future mate's name.

Some of these postcards depict one of these young woman as a witch, with various markers of witchcraft: a tall pointed hat, a broomstick for riding, a black cat, an owl, etc. The words on these cards reinforce the theme that women can actually do witchcraft, generally for the purpose of securing the affections of some young man. Here are four examples:

Example #3: "Young man have a care, Witches are flying through the air,
Not old and ugly; but young and fair."

Example #4: " 'Tis Hallowe'en tonight. And all pretty girls are witches. Beware."

Example #5: "At Midnight 'neath the Witches' Tree
Who dares keep Hallow-E'en with me?"

[134] Blain (1912), pp. 23, 32.

Example #6: "Hallowe'en. It's best beware of the witching hour
In which the witches show their power."

Example #3

Example #4

Example #5

Example #6

Of course, a woman's power to attract a man, whether he will or not, has been regarded as a sort of witchcraft or magic for millenia, long before such postcards were ever printed. Thus, for example, the Latin words *grammatica* 'a grammar' and *grammaticus* 'a grammarian' or 'a bookish person' are the remote ancestors, by way of Old French *gramaire,* of our modern English word *glamour,* as well as of *grimoire* 'a book of magic.'[135] Similarly, the Latin word *carmen* 'a song' or 'a magic spell' is the ancestor, by way of Old French *charme,* of our English word *charm,* which can refer to a magic spell as well as to a woman's power over others.[136]

6.4 Five Popular Books on Witchcraft, 1925–1931

As soon as fashionable young women knew themselves to be witches—if only in half-jest—and able to bewitch others, especially young men, publishers began to market substantial books on witchcraft to them. In fact, several such books appeared on the market from 1925 onward, though they were more in the nature of histories than how-to manuals. Thus the purchaser could claim merely to be curious about the past, and not actually trying to master the practice of witchcraft herself.

One of the first of these books was Ian Ferguson's *The Philosophy of Witchcraft,* republished in New York in 1925 from an original edition put out in London the previous year. The author posits four stages in the history of the witch.[137] In her first stage, the witch was the revered wise-woman, the priestess, the physician and the lore-keeper of her prehistoric tribe. In her second stage, the witch's dominant position was taken from her by elite men, masters of the arts of war and politics, though the common folk still relied on her for aid and comfort. In her third stage, the witch became the scapegoat by whose death these elite men, now masters of State and Church alike, assuaged their own fears of women's power. And now, says Ferguson, the witch is entering into the fourth stage of her long history, when her seemingly magical skills, long dismissed as mere superstition, are once again beginning to be taken seriously, and are being investigated in the light of applied psychology and parapsychology. These investigations, Ferguson predicts, will ring in a new, more natural and beneficial spirituality, freed from the ancient abuses of powerful, corrupt churches and states.

A second such book, published only by a London publisher, but available in the United States through the flourishing trans-Atlantic book trade, was John William Wickwar's *Witchcraft and the Black Art: A Book Dealing with the Psychology and Folklore of the Witches.* It bears no date of publication, but from internal evidence it was published in 1925 or very soon thereafter. While Ferguson wrote mostly about political and social history, Wickwar relied heavily on folklore in drafting his account. (He dedicated his book to a former President of the Folklore Society.) Thus his book has more to say about the actual or reputed practices of witches

[135] Skeat (1910), pp. 241, 241.
[136] Skeat (1910), p. 103.
[137] Ferguson (1925), pp. 7–9.

themselves than does Ferguson's. Although it is not a how-to book, one could create such a book from it by copying out some of its pages.[138]

Like Ferguson, Wickwar says that the roots of witchcraft go back to prehistoric, pagan times. Unlike Ferguson, however, he claims that once Christianity had come to Europe, witchcraft evolved under its influence into a sort of "pseudo-religious organization" with its own priests, rituals and yearly calendar of festivals; and he devotes several chapters to a description of these things.[139] He makes no mention, however, of any possibility that this pseudo-religious organization might have survived in secret down to his own times.

Charles Wolfran Olliver's *An Analysis of Magic and Witchcraft: A Retrospective Introduction to the Study of Modern Metapsychics* was published in 1928 in London by a firm (Rider & Co.) that offered an extensive catalog of its occult publications.[140] Despite the book's title, it devotes only a very few and banal pages to witchcraft; most of the book is concerned with magic in general. Like Ferguson, Olliver looks to parapsychology—"metapsychics," as he calls it—for an eventual explanation of the genuine effectiveness of magic.

A fourth such book appeared in English translation from its French original in 1931.[141] This was Émil-Jules Grillot de Givry's *Witchcraft, Magic & Alchemy,* a popular, very heavily illustrated book. In fact, the author's text, from beginning to end, is little more than a commentary on each successive illustration. The first of its three parts is devoted to sorcerers and witches; the second, to magic; and the third, to alchemy. Despite, or maybe because of, the author's very light touch, it was probably the most influential of the five books discussed here. It is from Grillot de Givry, for instance, that present-day Witches have taken the special term for their black-handled magical knife: *arthame* (now more often *athame* or *athalme)*.[142]

By far the longest and most substantial of the five books discussed here is *Witches Still Live* by Theda Kenyon (1894–1997), published in 1929. Kenyon had a very long career as a writer of poetry and prose, but she is remembered today mostly for this book of hers on witchcraft. In it she drew heavily on Leland's *Aradia* (see section 5 above), Margaret A. Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (see section 7 below), the books by Ferguson and Wickwar just discussed, and a fine selection of scholarly works on witchcraft and magic.[143] It is a rich hodge-podge of history, folklore, anthropology, speculation, anecdotes of magic's effectiveness, and all-around weirdness, enlivened with spooky black-and-white illustrations drawn to shock and fascinate.

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[138] Wickwar was also the author of *Dreams: What They Are and What They Mean* (1916) and *The Ghost World: Its Realities, Apparitions and Spooks* (1920).

[139] Wickwar (1925), espcially chh. I–II.

[140] Olliver (1928).

[141] Grillot de Givry's original book in French is titled *Musée des sorciers, mages et alchemists* (Paris: Librarie de France, 1929).

[142] Grillot de Givry (1931), pp. 90–91, 103–108, 133. He spells the word *arthame;* the other two spellings are later, arising from varying English (mis)pronunciations of *r* or *l* before another consonant. *Athame* was popularized by Gerald Gardner, *athalme* by Sybil Leek.

[143] Kenyon (1929), pp. 357–361, lists well over a hundred books and articles that she had consulted, including Ferguson (1925), Wickwar (1925), and Murray (1921).

The very richness of this mixture ensured that it would be read, reread and recommended to other readers.

Kenyon's principal thesis is boldly stated in the title of her book: *Witches Still Live.* As Kenyon sees it, there have always been Witches, who moreover practice Witchcraft as their religion. There have always been people who know how to do magic that works—though no modern scientist understands how or why it works. More sensationally, any of her readers might hope to become a Witch, or practice Witchcraft as a religion, or learn how to work effective magic.

To be sure, Kenyon makes no distinction between witchcraft, folk magic and superstitious magical practices, nor between witchcraft and Satanism. She writes,

> It seems to me that witchcraft has always existed, but has only recently become a possible topic of general conversation. As a result of the lifting of the taboo, society has been brought face to face, forcibly and somewhat uncomfortably, with an astounding undercurrent of a civilization which formerly seemed fairly free of "ignorant superstition." . . . . .
>
> Nor is this a matter of chance. The witch-cult is as organized today as it was in the Middle Ages, when the Covens flourished throughout Europe. The most casual examination will show that there are societies of Satanists in England, France, Italy and Germany. Moreover, there are hundreds of "believers" free of any organization whatever. Yet they carry on the old faiths, the old rituals. In many a church, the Host has been stolen from the tabernacle too often to permit any other explanation than the continued celebration of the Black Mass.[144]

6.5 Enter William Seabrook, Stage Left

To this volatile mixture we must now add the works of the explorer, adventurer, journalist, writer, and all-around *aficionado* of magic and witchcraft, William Seabrook (1886–1945).[145] He was the author of three highly sensational travel books, which told of his exotic adventures and his encounters with magic in strange lands: *Adventures in Arabia: Among the Bedouins, Druses, Whirling Dervishes and Yezidee Devil Worshippers* [throughout the Near East] (1927); *The Magic Island* [in Haïti] (1929); and *Jungle Ways* [in French West Africa, as it was then called] (1930).

A decade later he published his major work on magic, *Witchcraft, Its Power in the World Today* (1940). Between books he experimented with assorted perversions (on one occasion even with actual cannibalism), tried his hand at killing Hitler at a distance by magic, married three wives in

[144] Kenyon (1929), pp. 16–17.
[145] On Seabrook generally, see Worthington (1966) and Zieger (2012).

succession, and spent years slowly dying from alcoholism.[146] He lived abroad for long periods of time; he hobnobbed with Aleister Crowley in New York and with some of the avant-garde in Paris; and he generally fascinated—and often as not also repulsed—everyone with whom he came in extended contact.

The details of his own magical practices, and the unique theories he evolved to account for their seeming effectiveness, need not detain us here. What is important for us now is simply that he published a widely-read, sensational book on magic, which offered a way of magical practice that he claimed was effective, and that could rightly be called "witchcraft."

In 1941 an English publisher brought out a reprint of Seabrook's *Witchcraft,* which fell into the hands of a man named Gerald Brosseau Gardner. He mentions Seabrook's book in the oldest of his handwritten books of magic and witchcraft, *Ye Bok of Ye Art Magical,* and his own practice of Witchcraft came to be heavily influenced by Seabrook's work.[147] We shall return briefly to Gardner and his Witchcraft in the last chapter of this book.

6.6 Witchcraft as a Hidden Survival of an Ancient Pagan Religion

Here we should make a small detour to the United Kingdom, where a few folklorists looked at the records of earlier trials for witchcraft through the lens of a pre-conceived idea that at least some of the accused women and men were actually secret adherents of a secret Pagan religion, the history of which reached far back into pre-Christian times. Despite the official conversion of Europe to Christianity, they conjectured, some stubborn Pagans had converted in public form only, but continued to practice their ancestral religion in deep forests, on lonely mountains, and under cover of night. Some of these secret Pagans could be found among the women and men accused of witchcraft.

The first to launch such a theory, so far as I know, was George Laurence Gomme (1853–1916), one of the founding members of the Folklore Society and its President for a number of years. In 1892 his *Ethnology in Folklore* was published, in which Gomme advances the hypothesis that the last surviving remnants of British Druidry were to be found in the practices of witches as described in the records of their trials from the seventeenth century.[148] He does not, however, posit any sort of still surviving secret organized religion to which these practices might belong.

It was another member of the Folklore Society, Margaret Alice Murray (1863–1963), who took this theory one step farther, and argued for the existence of just such an underground Witch-cult that had survived as an organized religion throughout the long centuries ever since the

[146] An illustrated account of his attempt to kill Hitler was published in the magazine *Life:* later a second account appeared under his byline in a newspaper, *The San Francisco Examiner:* see Anonymous (1941) and Seabrook (1943).
[147] In a note at the end of the short text "Of the Ordeal of the Art Magical" (which occupies pp. 71–73 of Gardner's manuscript).
[148] Gomme (1892), pp. 58–62.

official conversion of Europe to Christianity. She argued for this theory first in an article published in the journal *Folklore,* and then in a book with the title, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*.[149]

Margaret Alice Murray
(Wikipedia)

At first Murray's book attracted little attention in the United States, but soon a copy fell into the hands of a popular writer on matters of religion, a former Catholic priest, now an anti-clerical Freethinker, Joseph McCabe. McCabe was a very prolific writer, and he wrote for the masses. He contributed many slim volumes to the enormously popular series of radical "Little Blue Books," which were published by the Haldeman-Julius Publishing Company at Girard, Kansas, from 1919 through 1978.

In 1926 there appeared his *New Light on Witchcraft,* no. 1132 of the "Little Blue Books." It was one of the fifty titles on religion which he planned to contribute to the series. His booklet was only 62 pages long, but it reached thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of readers. McCabe here summarized and endorsed Murray's views on Witchcraft as a secret religion, hidden for millennia from the state-sponsored Christian church. It was McCabe's small booklet, rather than Murray's own works, which familiarized countless readers in the United States with her theory that many of the men and women executed for the crime of witchcraft were actually secret adherents of an ancient underground Pagan religion.

Murray's work, especially as popularized by McCabe, is the second intimation in the United States that Witchcraft is a religion and that Witches are adherents of that religion.

[149] Murray (1917, 1921). She eventually published two more books developing the same theme further: Murray (1933, 1954). On Murray and witchcraft see now Simpson (1994, 1996), Oates & Wood (1998), Wood (2001), and Noble (2005). I have no evidence that Murray had read any of Charles Leland's works, but if she had, then Leland's view of Italian witchcraft as the remnants of Italy's pre-Christian religion, may have influenced her work.

Section 7

Witches In the American Fantasy, Science Fiction and Horror Community

7.1 Writers and Witch-Wives

Hitherto we have been discussing the history of how the idea developed in the United States that people, particularly women, might have reason to identify themselves as Witches, or—rarely—even to adopt "Witchcraft" as a name for whatever out-of-the-mainstream religious views they might hold. Now we turn to women who actually did identify themselves as witches, that is, women who practiced magic and called themselves witches, during the first half of the twentieth century.

I have found three such women in the course of research for this book, and there may well be more whom I have overlooked. Their names are Leslyn MacDonald Heinlein, Jonquil Stephens Leiber and Shirley Jackson Hyman. The period of their activity extends at least from the later 1930s into the early 1950s. Each woman deserves a fuller treatment than I am able to provide here, but at least I can put on record what I have found so far.

Leslyn MacDonald Heinlein
(Hanley 2016)

Fritz and Jonquil Stephens Leiber
(Leiber 1983–84, pt. 2)

7.2 Leslyn MacDonald, Wife of Robert A. Heinlein

The first of these women was Leslyn MacDonald (1904–1981), who was married to Robert A. Heinlein as his second wife for about sixteen years (1932–1948). MacDonald was a highly intelligent, talented woman, who had earned a Bachelor's degree in philosophy with honors from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1926, and a Master's degree in philosophy in 1930 from the University of Southern California. She wrote and published poetry, acted in plays and directed them, and worked for a while in the motion picture industry. One of her poems appeared in a Theosophical journal, *World Theosophy,* in 1931; her mother had been a member of the Theosophical Society.[150]

MacDonald also identified herself as a "white witch" in several of her letters from 1945, and mentioned spells that she was casting in all seriousness to protect her friends during the war—and in one case, to kill a personal enemy.[151] No doubt more would be found about her witchcraft if anyone were to go through whatever may have survived of her correspondence in the literary archives of the science fiction and fantasy authors and editors in whose circles she moved.

It is virtually certain that MacDonald was the model for the witch Amanda Todd Jennings in Robert A. Heinlein's novel, *The Devil Makes the Law* (1940).[152] (Appropriately enough, the original meaning of the Latin word *amanda* is "she who is to be loved," a good name for the author's wife.) One might expect that Amanda's fictional practice of witchcraft may reflect some of the details of MacDonald's real practice. Whether or not this is so, almost all of what is described in Heinlein's story was taken from Grillot de Givry's *Witchcraft, Magic & Alchemy* in its English translation of 1931—whether by Heinlein only, or by his wife before him, remains unknown. Only a few details in the story seem to have had other sources: some of the herbal lore, the otherwise unattested word *mekagran,* and Satan's second name, Mekratrig.[153]

For two or three years around 1940–1941 MacDonald and her husband hosted a small science-fiction discussion group, the Mañana Literary Society, in their California home. The rocket engineer and Crowleyan magician, John Whiteside ("Jack") Parsons, was a regular member; L. Ron Hubbard was an occasional guest.[154]

The fact that MacDonald and Parsons were acquainted gives rise to a new question. Toward the end of his life, from the late 1940s until 1952, Parsons was working toward the creation of a

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[150] See James (2001, 2002) and Patterson (2010–2014) for details of her life.
[151] James (2001), p. 25; Patterson (2010–2014), I, pp. 146, 222, 343, 521 (note 7), 564–565 (notes 20–21).
[152] Heinlein (1940).
[153] *Mekagran* occurs in the phrase "pentacles, mekagrans, and runes": Heinlein (1940), p. 76. *Mekratrig* was taken from Charles G. Finney's novel, *The Circus of Doctor Lao* (1936): Heinlein (1940), pp. 80, 83.
[154] Carter (1999), pp. 60, 65, 80; Pendle (2005), pp. 228–231, 253–254. Parsons was one of the non-academic rocketry enthusiasts behind the founding of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory at the California Institute of Technology. Hubbard later founded the Church of Scientology.

new magical religion, which he called "The Witchcraft." Only brief manuscript and typescript fragments of his work on The Witchcraft remain now; they were published only recently.[155] What remains is full of echoes of Aleister Crowley's work, as well as Leland's *Aradia,* but could they also contain traces of MacDonald's sort of witchcraft?[156] The question has to remain open for now, for lack of evidence one way or the other.

7.3 Jonquil Stephens, Wife of Fritz Leiber

Jonquil Stephens (1907–1969) was already a poet and writer when she married Fritz Leiber in 1936, but after her marriage she supported her husband's career as a writer of science fiction and fantasy, and seemingly made little effort to have any of her own works published.[157] Her husband characterized her as "a gifted fortune teller," and their son, Justin, wrote that she had always "had a fascination with witchcraft and had read much about it."[158] Fritz Leiber says that he himself became more and more fascinated with witchcraft and magic over the years of their marriage and after his wife's death.[159]

In 1943 Leiber published the first version of a fantasy novel, *Conjure Wife.* (A revised, much longer version of it appeared in 1952.[160]) Its protagonist is a scientifically minded college professor of anthropology, Norman Saylor, who is just beginning his academic career. By chance he discovers that his wife, Tansy, has been practicing magic to protect him from the hazards of academic life.[161] He makes her stop, and they destroy all the charms she has made.

However, as it happens, all the wives of professors at the college have been avidly using magic to advance their husbands' careers and otherwise enhance their own lives; and their magic works. The clueless husbands—including Norman at first—have no idea that their wives are doing this. Indeed, men in general never suspect how much real magic modern women are doing all the time.

Without Tansy's magical protections, Norman's academic career begins to tank, and even their lives are in danger, though the dangers that threaten them defy science and even reason. Norman begins to suspect there may be something to magic after all, and after a series of very close calls they finally defeat their enemies. And Norman is finally convinced that magic really works.

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[155] See Parsons (1989), especially pp. 50–53, 69–73. See also Hedenborg White (2019).
[156] It is uncertain whether Parsons had read Leland's *Aradia* (1899), or only knew Theda Kenyon's retelling of its legends in her book, *Witches Still Live* (1929).
[157] For a brief account of her writings, mostly unpublished, see Leiber (1978), pp. ix–x.
[158] Leiber (1984), p. 334; Leiber (1979), p. 16 [or Leiber (1982), p. 185].
[159] Schweitzer (1992), pp. 8–9.
[160] Leiber (1943, 1952). Cf. Leiber (1973) for the revision and publication history of *Conjure Wife;* from 1953 onward it was republished in several stand-alone editions.
[161] Tansy, one should note, is a protective herb, commonly put in closets, drawers, and so forth to preserve their contents against insects.

Leiber says that his principal sources for the magic described in his novel were a one-volume edition of *The Golden Bough* by James Frazer, and *The Folklore of the Southern Negro* by Newbell Niles Puckett.[162] He does not, however, draw very heavily on these sources; the magic that Tansy and the other faculty wives do is not described in much detail.

Leiber does state that Norman and Tansy are his fictionalized versions of himself and Jonquil.[163] This may serve as weak confirmation that Leiber's wife, too, actually practiced some form of magic or witchcraft, though the novel gives no real insight into the details of her practices—to which Leiber himself may not have paid much attention.

7.4 Shirley Jackson, Witch and Writer

Shirley Jackson (1916–1965) was a writer specializing in finely crafted stories of everyday horror and uncanny mystery, though she wrote many other sorts of articles for the income they brought her family. She was also the author of a straight-forward book on the witchcraft trials at Salem in 1692, aimed at younger readers.[164]

Shirley Jackson, 1938
(Oppenheimer 1988)

[162] Leiber (1984), p. 348. The books that he mentions are Frazer (1922) and Puckett (1926).
[163] Leiber (1984), p. 348; Leiber (1983–1984), part 2, p. 22.
[164] Jackson (1956).

In the publicity for her first two books, published in 1948 and 1949, Jackson allowed herself to be called a practicing witch. Here are the relevant sentences from the publisher's dust-jackets for each of them:

> Shirley Jackson, we are reliably informed, is perhaps the only contemporary writer who is a practicing amateur witch, specializing in small-scale black magic and fortune-telling with a tarot deck.[165]

and

> It is said that Miss Jackson is perhaps the only contemporary writer who is a practicing amateur witch, specializing in small-scale black magic. Readers of THE LOTTERY may find this not hard to believe.[166]

In 1949, too, Jackson was interviewed by a reporter with the Associated Press, William Garland Rogers. Much of the interview, as it was published, dwelt on Jackson's use of magic and hinted that she identified herself as a witch. He wrote,

> With brown hair combed back tight from her high forehead and fastened with a barrette at the nape, with attractive features and a pair of quite un-evil eyes behind glasses, she does not resemble a witch. She has none of a witch's paraphernalia, either, such as charms, amulets or broomsticks, though she did have a "grimoire," or black-magic book, with some incantations written in it.
>
> She doesn't believe in these devices. On the contrary, all that is needed is "clarity of thought," evidently a kind of concentration, an unshakable conviction. . . . And thus she says she can break a man's leg, or throw a girl down an elevator shaft.
>
> Such things have happened, she says. With some matches she fashioned a crude figure of a man, named him, broke the match representing one of his legs, and sat back and waited.
>
> Believe it or not, the minute he stepped into Vermont, he broke a leg. She made a likeness of a girl falling down an elevator shaft, and the girl fell.
>
> "You mean you think the leg was broken and the girl fell because of your hexes?" I asked. No, she said, she merely claimed that the mishaps occurred "after" the hexes. "Will somebody sue you for assault if I put this in a story?" I asked. "What do you think?" she retorted. What I think is, that no one can sue her for breaking a matchstick or drawing a picture.
>
> As it is easy to see, she's very like a witch in one respect: She is hard to pin down. She insists that "it's hard to explain it so that it will make sense." However,

[165] Jackson (1948), dust jacket.
[166] Jackson (1949), dust jacket.

she tries. She can't break legs across state lines; if she could, "there's a little critic down in Texas" who would be limping now. She admits that it doesn't always work.

Miss Jackson tells you all this with a smile, but she is not joking. She owns a library of 200 books on the subject, from Cotton Mather to Mary MacLane and others.[167] Stigmata, she says, differ from the magic in which she works only in that stigmata are visible.

Magic, she is convinced, is better than science; most people are tired of a world which eternally goes on the assumption that one and one make two instead of three or four, or a world which places no credence in anything that can't be seen or touched.[168]

To summarize this long quote, Jackson says that her magic does not require any paraphernalia to be effective. All that is needed for magic to work is "clarity of thought" on the part of the witch or magician. (It is Rogers, slightly misunderstanding Jackson, who glosses that phrase as meaning "a kind of concentration, an unshakable conviction.")

This is precisely the sort of mind-over-matter power that Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, feared deeply, naming it "malicious animal magnetism" and at times even condemning it as "witchcraft." (See section 2.4 above.) Moreover, this sort of magic had also been widely popularized in New Thought circles by William Walker Atkinson in the early 1900s, chiefly through his book, *Mind Power: The Secret of Mental Magic.* (See section 2.5.) It also has many points of contact with Charles Godfrey Leland's theory of the hidden powers of the mind, as expounded in his *The Mystic Will.* (See section 5.3.)

Jackson would first have learned about this sort of "clarity of thought" at home in the San Francisco Bay area, before leaving it for college. As it happened, her mother and her maternal grandmother were Christian Scientists (and her grandmother was even a Christian Science Practitioner for a while), and her mother also dabbled in popular occultism—reading fortunes in tea leaves, using an ouija board, and so forth. As children, Jackson and her brother attended their local Christian Science church on Sundays, where they would have become quite familiar with Eddy's views.[169]

In general, Christian Science and various forms of New Thought, as well as occultism, were quite popular in that part of California while Jackson was growing up there. The first Christian Science church in the San Francisco Bay area was established in 1895; New Thought churches had appeared there more than a decade earlier.[170] Atkinson's many books were also sold

[167] For Mary MacLane, a largely forgotten writer now, see Faxneld (2017), ch. 10.
[168] Rogers (1949).
[169] Oppenheimer (1988), pp. 18–20. Franklin (2016), p. 108, astutely notes the connection between Jackson's childhood exposure to Christian Science and her certainty that magic could really be made to work.
[170] Franklin (2016), pp. 20–21.

widely there. It is quite likely that Jackson had encountered his theory of "mental magic," if only at second hand, during her adolescence.

Jackson's interest in magic and witchcraft went back to her high-school years.[171] Over the decades of her life her library of books on those subjects grew to more than five hundred volumes.[172]

Literary critics and biographers have doubted whether Jackson, being a sophisticated and highly intelligent author, could possibly have taken magic and witchcraft seriously. However, her children and close friends had no doubt that she was quite serious about her own magical practice, and that she was convinced by experience that magic could be made to work by any sufficiently insightful person. Nor did she much mind being called a witch. [173]

7.5 Aftermath: Families of Witches in Film and on Television.

For much of the twentieth century film has had as great an impact as print on popular culture in the United States. So it may be worth mentioning very briefly two films that portrayed the female lead as a witch from a family of witches.

The earlier of the two was a comedy called *I Married a Witch;* it was released in 1942. Here the modern witch, Jennifer, is a re-embodied witch, who was executed at Salem in 1692 together with her father, also a witch. She and her father are now determined to avenge themselves on the living descendants of the man who had them executed. Plans are laid, but go awry, and in the end—thanks to a misused love potion—Jennifer ends up falling in love with the man on whom she had plotted revenge. They marry and have a daughter. As the film ends, their young daughter shows the first signs of her heritage as a witch. (The film is based on a book published in 1941, *The Passionate Witch,* by Thorne Smith and Norman Matson.)

The other film was *Bell, Book and Candle,* released in 1958. It is a romantic drama rather than a humorous one. Here, too, the leading woman is a witch, Gillian, born into a family of witches, one of a number of such families of witches and magicians. These families have their own subculture within the city, with their own nightclubs and other institutions, all of them unseen by ordinary people. In this drama witches must not fall in love and marry; if they do, they lose their witch powers: this hard fact is what drives the plot of the film and gives it tension. In the end Gillian does surrender to love: she marries and loses her powers as a witch. As one might expect for the 1950s, domesticity wins out over personal (witchy) power for Gillian.

This film was based on a play with the same title by John van Druten; it was published in 1951, though written and performed as early as 1948. In the play, though not in the film, witches

[171] Oppenheimer (1988), pp. 36–37.
[172] Oppenheimer (1988), p. 188.
[173] Oppenheimer (1988), pp. 36–37, 188–190, 222–228.

have a sacred book, the *Manual,* on which they swear their oaths in the names of "Tagla, Salamandrae, Brazo and Vesturiel," much as Christian non-witches swear oaths on the Bible in the name of God. Thus the Witchcraft of Gillian's family's is presented in the play as their religion, too.[174]

The important point for our book is simply the assumption that witchcraft runs in families. This was a relatively new idea which these films introduced into public discourse about witch-women in the United States. A few years later the same notion of families of witches and other magical people shows up in two series produced for television: *Bewitched* (1964–1972) and *The Addams Family* (1964–1966).[175]

And that brings us, briefly, to the work of the cartoonist Charles Addams, and the very weird family that was the subject of many of his cartoons from the 1930s onward: Gomez, Morticia, Wednesday, Pugsley, Granny Frump, Uncle Fester, Lurch the Butler, Thing, and Cousin It.[176] Although Granny is a witch, it is not witchcraft *per se* that runs in the Addams family, but macabre and magical weirdness. Yet it is not all that far from a family tradition of weirdness to a family tradition of magic and witchcraft. Charles Addams has his place, too, on the sidelines of the history of New Witches in the United States.

[174] Van Druten (1951), p. 11.
[175] Gibson (2007), pp. 194–223, discusses the two films and the TV series *Bewitched* quite insightfully.
[176] See now Miserocchi (2010) for a first-rate overview of the Addams family.

Section 8

Family Traditions of Witchcraft in the United States Before the 1960s

8.1 Summing Up So Far

Let us now sum up the results of our investigation so far. We have established the following historical facts:

- The theory and practices of animal magnetism became popular throughout the United States from the late 1830s onward. It was soon realized that the phenomena produced by these magnetizers strikingly resembled the phenomena taken as evidence of witchcraft in past centuries. One conclusion drawn from this resemblance was that some witches in the past were not mere innocent victims of deluded persecuters, but actually could do—and most likely did do—some of the seemingly supernatural things they were accused of doing. However, they did them by natural means, that is, by using animal magnetism, not by supernatural ones.

- Lectures and demonstrations by traveling magnetizers inspired some members of their audiences to draw further conclusions. Two of them were important for the history we are tracing here: Phineas Parkhurst Quimby and Andrew Jackson Davis.

- Phineas Parkhurst Quimby's work as a healer gave rise to the various new religions grouped together as Christian Science and the Metaphysical (or New-Thought) religions. The mind-over-matter teachings of these religions led to ways of religous practice that were thought to affect physical reality to some degree, much like magic and witchcraft in the past. Again, the effects of these practices had natural causes, not supernatural ones.

- One influential New-Thought author, William Walker Atkinson, eventually went so far as to expound a complex theory of effective magic—a theory which had no supernatural or spiritual component whatever—in a volume of nearly 450 pages, *Mind Power: The Secret of Mental Magic,* which was first published in 1912. It has remained in print and continues to sell up to the present.

- Andrew Jackson Davis invented the ritual of the Spirit Circle, which ideally consisted of just thirteen (or sometimes, fourteen) people: six men, six women, and one (or sometimes) two mediums of either sex—but usually wome n. He also created a body of spiritual doctrine which he and his followers called "The Harmonial Philosophy." Followers of Davis generally adopted his spiritual doctrine and his ritual of the Spirit Circle.

- From 1848 onward another new religion, Spiritualism, rapidly took shape. By 1870 it had spread very widely throughout the United States. The central activities of this new religion

were the séance and the spirit lecture. The séance, or Spirit Circle, adopted Davis's model as much as practical. Though the number of people in such a circle might be either more or less than thirteen, one of their number would normally be a medium. The great majority of mediums would be women, though there were also prominent mediums who were men. Mediums would also give public lectures in auditoriums, where the lecture was believed to be given by a spirit using the medium's voice and body.

- As with animal magnetism, so with Spiritualism: the phenomena produced in the Spirit Circle strikingly resembled the phenomena that had been taken as evidence of witchcraft in past centuries. This resemblance was widely recognized at the time by prominent Spiritualists, who pointed it out in print and in public lectures. Some of these Spiritualists would occasionally go so far as to insist there was no essential difference between witches of the past and mediums of the present, and that you might just as well call a Spiritualist medium a witch. Indeed, one device for communicating with spirits—one of the earliest ouija boards—was actually marketed under the name of "Witch Board." And as late as 1922 the poet Robert Frost could write a poem about an elderly woman Spiritualist medium under the title "The Witch of Coos," and expect that his readers would know that a medium and a witch could be two words for one and the same kind of person.

- On another note, during the second half of the nineteenth century a few of the most radical, free-thinking women leaders in first-wave feminism claimed in their publications that the women who had been persecuted and executed as witches in the past were very often the wise women of their era, the independent women whose deep knowledge and uncommon mastery of natural forces were taken as a strong challenge by the powerful, male-dominated Church and State. Witches of bygone centuries should be claimed as worthy forerunners by the suffragettes and feminists of the late nineteenth century.

- In the early twentieth century, one of these radical women strongly influenced the very favorable portrayal of Glinda, the Good Witch of the South, in L. Frank Baum's enormously popular series of fourteen children's books about the Land of Oz. These books caused a real change in the popular conception of the witch: now she could be an exceptionally beautiful, powerful and wise woman who could be admired, not an aged and malevolent crone to be feared.

- During the last decade of the nineteenth century, the popular writer, Charles Godfrey Leland, did two important things in several of his books. First, in his book, *Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches of Italy,* he claimed to have found among the witches (*streghe*) of Italy a very old religion, kept alive in secret among some of the lowest orders of society. In discussing what he had found, he proposed that it was a "counter-religion," that is, a religion opposed to the established and public religion of the society in which it had survived.

- And second, in several of his books Leland put forth his own new theory of effective magic, which resembled the theory of magic developed by the New-Thought writer, William Walker Atkinson. Like Atkinson's theory, Leland's had no supernatural or spiritual component, but

rested on the natural, yet overlooked, powers of the human mind. Atkinson himself saw the similarity, and republished the most comprehensive of Leland's books on magic, *The Mystic Will,* in the same year, 1907, as he published the first version of his own *Mind Power.*

- By the end of the nineteenth century witchcraft had also become a fashionable thing which young unmarried women might affect and might play with, especially in their subtle dealings with young unmarried men, and especially at Hallowe'en. Indeed, some young women might even take their witchcraft seriously, or at least half-seriously. If they did, several up-to-date books soon became available which they might read to learn more about magic and witchcraft, or even to develop rites and practices for their own witchcraft and magic. The especially daring among them might even turn to William Seabrook's somewhat shocking books on these subjects.

- We actually can document a few women who did take their witchcraft seriously, and called themselves witches, in the 1930s and 1940s. They were writers, and wives of writers, in the genres of horror, fantasy and science fiction.

- And—one last thing—there was a widely circulated booklet claiming that there actually still existed a secret underground counter-religion of Witchcraft in England, too, not only in Italy. The roots of that English counter-religion went back thousands of years, and its adherents recognized themselves as witches. This was Joseph McCabe's brief *New Light on Witchcraft,* which let that particular cat out of the bag for thousands of readers in the United States.

It has been a long and winding road that has brought us to this point. Now we are approaching its end at last.

8.2 Family Traditions of Religion and Occultism in the United States

The United States—in contrast to Europe—has never allowed any state-mandated religion or religious practices. Consequently, it is only within families that religions are handed down from one generation to the next. Protestant parents will usually raise Protestant children and grandchildren, and the same will be true for all the other major religions. This is also true of the less well-known religions such as Spiritualism, Christian Science and the various Metaphysical or New Thought religions. There are Spiritualist families who have held to that religion for many generations; the same is true of Christian Scientists, and of adherents of various New Thought religions.

The same has also long been true, for example, of various fraternal organizations such as the Freemasons. There are families where for some generations the men joined Masonic lodges and were initiated into Masonic degrees, while the women in their families joined auxiliary Masonic organizations such as the Order of the Eastern Star; there were also auxiliary Masonic organizations for the boys and girls in Masonic families.

In the same way, there are esoteric and occult families. Some of them self-identified as Rosicrucian families, Theosophical families, and so forth. Others pasted no label on themselves, but simply followed their own paths.

Could there also be family traditions of very small religions and secretive counter-religions? Yes, of course there *could* be, though that deck would always be stacked against their survival, since their members would be many fewer, and thus it would be significantly harder for young single men and women to meet co-religionists in their quests for a spouse.

But even so, witchcraft is something of a special case here, since Spiritualist mediums, and at times even people who practiced New Thought magic, have been able legitimately to call themselves witches. Especially where Spiritualism is concerned, there has been a century and a half of tradition to justify the equation, medium = witch. Could there have been, even in the twentieth century, families that have been Spiritualists for a good number of generations, in which the family members (or at least those of them who are mediums) think of themselves as witches, and consider their practices to be a form of witchcraft?

Yes, certainly there *could* have been. I think I may even have an example to offer readers here.

8.3 The Example of Gundella: Witchcraft and Spiritualism

Gundella was a prominent public personage in and around Detroit, Michigan, for more than two decades before her death in 1993. She claimed to be a witch from a family of witches. She was a retired schoolteacher. After her retirement she started a second career as a writer and entertainer on witchcraft and other occult matters. She frequently appeared on radio and television, and she wrote many columns for local newspapers. She performed as a witchy entertainer for children and adults in their home parties, she offered magical advice to inquirers, and so forth. She also published two books of Michigan ghost stories: *The Werewolf of Grosse Point* (1976) and *Michigan Haunts and Hauntings* (1992).

In her private life Gundella was Marion (Clark) (Mulleague) Kuclo (1930–1993). She was born Marion Elizabeth Clark in Port Huron, in northern Michigan, and raised in nearby in East Tawas. She said that she grew up in an old house with no indoor plumbing, where she and her parents lived with her maternal grandparents and her grandmother's own mother—a household of four generations. She moved to southern Michigan in 1948, when she turned 18, and she lived there for the rest of her life. Also, she said that she had joined her first coven when she was 18; it follows that this coven was in southern Michigan, not in or near East Tawas.[177]

[177] For her early life see especially Hirschman (1970), Gundella (1988).

Gundella (with young woman)[178]

When Gundella appeared as a witch in public, she sometimes wore green makeup, just like Margaret Hamilton playing the Wicked Witch of the West in the film, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Often she would say—somewhat tongue-in-cheek, I suspect—that she was not a descendant of just any old witches, but of "the Green Witches of Scotland."

More frequently she would say that her mother and her mother's mother had been witches, too, and that she had learned her witchcraft from them while growing up. Also, one of her great-great-grandmothers, the mother of her great-grandfather, had been a witch back in Scotland, she said.[179]

Gundella also said that she knew of three traditional covens in Michigan: they met in Ann Arbor, near Sandusky, and near Oscoda.[180] The coven in Ann Arbor was certainly Gundella's own, and the coven near Oscoda was almost as certainly her mother's.[181] Professor Marcello Truzzi of Eastern Michigan University (at Ypsilanti) had been a close friend of Gundella's since 1969. He reports that he, too, knew of three old covens in Michigan, and had seen documents confirming their existence.[182] Presumably they were the same three covens that Gundella had mentioned.

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[178] Online at: **http://gundella.blogspot.com/2011/07/1971-press-photo-of-gundella-from.html**

[179] Hirschman (1970), Gundella (1971, 1988, and elsewhere). Gundella's mother was Violet Elizabeth (Thornton) Clark and her maternal grandmother was Lula C. (Bell) Thornton. Grandmother Thornton's father, and thus one of Gundella's four great-grandfathers, had been born in Scotland; his name was Andrew Bell. It would have been his mother who Gundella thought had been a witch in Scotland.

[180] Allerdyce (1973).

[181] Hirschman (1970) mentions Gundella's coven and her mother's coven: hers met four times a year, on the cross-quarter days; her mother's, once a month. (Ann Arbor is quite near Detroit, and East Tawas is near Sandusky.) For the three covens see now Anonymous (2022).

[182] Truzzi (1972), pp. 25–26; Truzzi (1974), pp. 637, 640–641.

Occasionally Gundella would share some of her witch ancestors' simple practices in one or another of her numerous newspaper columns. The practices that she described in her columns were often common magical folklore of the nineteenth century, for example, waiting for the right phase of the moon to cut hair, to plant, to cast a spell for love or for money, or to wind up a love affair or piece of business.[183]

Each of Gundella's two books contains instructions for occult practices—but the practices described in them are not magical ones; rather, they are practices that Spiritualists have long used to get messages from the spirits of the dead. Her sets of instructions tell the reader how to hold a séance, and how to do automatic writing with a planchette.[184] This suggests, I think, that the women in her maternal ancestry, whom she said were witches, were Spiritualists who thought of themselves as witches. In other words, Gundella's family tradition, at least in the United States, seems likely to have been a tradition of Spiritualism which also legitimately called itself Witchcraft.

In 1971 Gundella also published a vinyl long-playing record titled *The Hour of the Witch.* It features Gundella talking at some length about Witchcraft as a pre-Christian "old religion,"and also about effective spell-casting.[185]

On this record Gundella briefly laid out the three tenets of her "old religion" (as she called it), and then she expounded her theory of effective spell-casting, with examples. Briefly, her old religion believed in (1) a universal source of magical power, (2) reincarnation, and (3) magic that really worked. As for spell-work, she explained that it was a craft which relied on the spell-caster's strong emotions, her tightly focused imagination (aided by skillful use of props and words), and her faith—that is, her unshakable belief—that she did truly have the ability and power to do effective magic. Her theory, therefore, is cut from much the same New Thought cloth as William Walker Atkinson's theory of effective magic: both theories rely on the presumed "power of mind over matter" (see section 2.5 above).

There is nothing there, and very little in any of her writings, that echoes the terminology and practices of British Wicca.[186] Rather, her family tradition seems to have its roots in Spiritualism and in New Thought.

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[183] There is a very large online archive of newspaper articles by or about Gundella, with other documentation for her life and activities, at **gundella.blogspot.com**, which is my principle source for my account of her.

[184] "How to Hold a Séance": Gundella (1976), pp. 76–79, and Gundella (1992), pp. 105–107; "Automatic Writing": Gundella (1992), pp. 75–77.

[185] Gundella (1971).

[186] She did employ the British Wiccan term "cone of power" once in an interview with a journalist (Hirschman 1970). She also quoted ritual material, "The Song of the Harvest Sabbat," from the British magician, William G. Gray, in one of her newspaper columns (Gundella 1975, quoting Gray 1970).

8.4 Another Michigan Family Tradition of Witchcraft

This is not the only credible inherited tradition of Witchcraft that arose in the United States independently from British Wicca. A few others have been lightly documented by Aidan A. Kelly, most fully in his book, *A Tapestry of Witches.*[187]

Not much is known about an Inner Circle of witches within the Ancient Order of the Magi, an astrological-magical order founded in 1888 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, by Olney Hawkins Richmond (1844–1920). A year or two later the Order of the Magi had moved its headquarters and Temple to Chicago, and soon it also opened a second Temple in Lansing, Michigan. Some years later it opened a third Temple in Michigan, at Capac (north of Detroit).[188] The title of a fully empowered member of the Order, who was authorized to conduct all the rituals of a Temple, was "Grand Master."

A very influential contemporary witch, John M. Hansen, reported that he had been initiated into a lineage of witches in 1962 in Chicago, in the basement of the occult bookstore run by Donald Nelson, by a woman named Virginia, who was a friend and fellow witch of Nelson's. Hansen was told by them that his lineage of witchcraft came from Olney Richmond, who had initiated his partner, Arlene L. Richmond (born Pauline Goede, 1891–1959), who in turn had initiated Nelson, who I presume was the man who had then initiated Virginia. Hansen seems not to have kept in close touch with members of this tradition after his initiation, but at least he could bear witness to its existence.[189]

Slightly more is known about a coven active in Birmingham, Michigan (quite near Detroit), the lineage of which very likely also descends from Olney Richmond. As in lodges of the Order of the Magi, the leader of the Birmingham coven has the title "Grand Master."

One initiate into that tradition, Kitty Lessing (born in 1943), wrote that the Birmingham Coven had been founded in the early twentieth century, and that its original Grand Master had run it for about 50 years. Sometime in the 1960s another man succeeded him as Grand Master. In the late 1960s the Birmingham coven stopped meeting there because of harassment by the local police. However, its Grand Master and three other members then moved to Hollywood, Florida, where they formed a new coven (the Hollywood Coven) to continue their tradition. Sometime later they were joined in Florida by the Lessing family, who had also been members of the Birmingham coven for years. Kitty's husband had been just a child member of the coven when it was still in Birmingham.[190] (She implies that she herself only married her husband and

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[187] Kelly (2014).

[188] McLaren-Owens (2007) has republished all the available early accounts of the Order of the Magi, its Temples and its founder in one convenient volume. For the Order's Temple at Lansing see pp. 33–36, 39–41. For its Temple at Capac see pp. 29–30. There is one reference to an "Inner Temple" within the Order (p. 27), for which see also Kelly (2014), p. 20. I have not found any mention of witches or witchcraft in McLaren-Owens's volume.

[189] Kelly (2014), pp. 19–27; Clifton (2006), pp. 128–129.

[190] Lessing (1972b, 1972c, 1974). The Hollywood Coven printed a newsletter, *The Black Lite* (later titled *The Enchanted Cauldron*), in the 1970s. See Kelly (2011), p. 55; Kelly (2014), pp. 33, 130, 152.

joined his coven in Florida, some years after his family had moved there, though she does not say so precisely.)

The Hollywood Coven's beliefs and practices, as Lessing described them, were chiefly based on Irish traditional lore as preserved in the Old Irish *Book of Invasions,* and they had nothing at all in common with British Wicca. Both Hansen and Lessing independently reported that normally a substantial amount of careful study was required of would-be initiates before they were initiated. (Something of an exception seems to have been made for Hansen, whose work required much travel.)

The Birmingham Coven might have been the coven that Gundella said she had joined in 1948, when she turned 18 and moved to the greater Detroit area.[191] (Later she belonged to a coven in Ann Arbor.)

8.5 Pre-Gardnerian Witchcraft in Wyoming

There was yet another pre-Gardnerian witch, Bonnie Lou (Woodright) Sherlock (1933–1976), who headed the "Delphic Coven" in Landers, Wyoming. Very little is known about her and her coven, but she published a "Delphic Manifesto" in 1972, which mentions the practices of her coven: they included "card reading, precognitive dreams, astrology, visions and mediumistic development."[192]

"Mediumistic development" is Spiritualist terminology for training a person to function as a Spiritualist medium; its use in the Coven's Manifesto suggests strongly that the witchcraft of the Delphic Coven, like the witchcraft of Gundella's family in northern Michigan, had its roots in Spiritualism.

And like the Birmingham and Hollywood Covens as well as Gundella's family covens, the Delphic Coven emphasized that it followed a Celtic tradition. As she told Margot Adler, Sherlock had an Irish-American grandmother, from whom she learned practices of Irish folk Catholicism that outsiders might regard as magic or witchcraft.[193]

KItty Lessing and Bonnie Sherlock were the only two witches in the United States, other than herself, whom Gwynne Thompson (see the next section) recognized as fellow-carriers of independent pre-Gardnerian Celtic traditions of witchcraft.[194]

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[191] Aidan Kelly (personal communication, 2023) told me that Gundella's close friend and fellow witch, Marcello Truzzi, confirmed this to him.

[192] Sherlock (1972). The Delphic Coven printed a newsletter, *The Medicine Wheel.* See Kelly (2011), p. 55; Kelly (2014), p. 129, 153.

[193] Sherlock (1972, 1974), Adler (1979), pp. 73–74, 362–363.

[194] Personal communications from Andrew Theitic, the archivist and historian of N. E. C. T. W.

8.6 The Example of Gwynne Thompson: Witchcraft, Lore and Occultism

Like Gundella, Gwynne (formerly Gwen) Thompson claimed to have inherited a family tradition of Witchcraft from her mother and maternal grandmother. As in Gundella's case, she does indeed seem to have inherited a religious and magical tradition, though the details are very different in each case. Unlike Gundella, Thompson trained and initiated a number of people outside of her own family, who in turn initiated others. Thus there are many Witches today who can trace their initiatory lineage back to her. Many of them are in covens affiliated with the group, New England Covens of Traditionalist Witches (N. E. C. T. W.).[195] And unlike Gundella, Thompson did eventually borrow heavily from British Wicca, so it requires careful analytical work to separate out her original inheritance from its Wiccan accretions.

Gwynne (Healy) (Grimes) (Johnson) Thompson was born Phyllis Ruth Healy (1928–1986). She was the only child of Walter Ellsworth Healy (1895–1931) and Ola Blanche Turner (1903–1996). Walter Healy, in turn, was the only child of Adriana Porter (1857–1946) and William Henry Healy (1857–1932). Her father, Thompson said, had been a Rosicrucian, and her paternal grandmother, Adriana Porter Healy, was the Witch in her immediate ancestry, from whom she had received her heritage of Witchcraft that, she said, had come down to her through the centuries. All three generations had lived together in her grandparents' house in Melrose, Massachusetts, where Thompson had grown up. Her father died when she was only about three years old and her grandfather in the following year, but her grandmother lived until 1946, when Thompson was about 20 years old. Thompson, her mother and her grandmother all continued to live together in their home in Melrose until 1941, when her grandmother moved into an assisted-living home in Melrose, Fitch House, while Thompson and her mother moved to an apartment near Fitch House.

Gwynne Thompson[196]

[195] This organization has a website: **nectw.org**.

[196] Online at: **https://thewitchesalmanac.com/pages/gwen-thompson**

Thompson's grandmother had been born in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, where her forebears had lived for at least three generations before her. Most of her more remote immigrant ancestors had come to Massachusetts from England in the early 1600s, some to Plymouth, others to Salem. In Salem, some of her ancestors had been involved in the witchcraft persecution of 1692, though none of them were among the people who had been accused of witchcraft. It was during the years leading up to the American War for Independence that her ancestors left New England for Nova Scotia, which had remained loyal to the British Crown. Yarmouth was a major seaport in Nova Scotia, and the folklore of Yarmouth was in large part folklore of the weather and the ocean.

As Thompson told her initiates, she had learned the basics of her Witchcraft while growing up in her grandmother's house. In 1946, when her grandmother died, Thompson inherited some of her papers on magic and Witchcraft, which she copied out and eventually included in the large handwritten book of sacred texts and rituals that she had her initiates copy out by hand for their own use. She regarded this book as the repository of her own inherited tradition of Witchcraft.

During her lifetime Thompson published just one text from her book.[197] Titled *The Rede of the Wiccae,* it was the subject of close analysis in a volume published in 2005, which also included a careful genealogical study of her ancestry and an account of the course of her life.

The Rede of the Wiccae consists of 26 rhyming couplets, grouped in pairs. Eighteen of those couplets are the work of one hand. They are in the same style and their meter has been done with skill. These 18 couplets show no influence whatever from British Wicca; rather, they give traditional folklore, connected mostly with the weather and the ocean, in poetic form. They are quite likely to have been the work of Thompson's grandmother; if not, they are certainly the work of a person who was of the same generation and was raised in a seaport. They clearly do not come from the pen of Thompson herself. The remaining 8 couplets, however, are another matter: their author did not have a very good understanding of poetic meters, and some of them show the influence of British Wicca, while others echo contemporary popular culture. They cannot have been written by Thompson's grandmother; most likely they were the work of Thompson herself.[198]

Since publishing our book on Thompson, we have learned that an influential Rosicrucian, Paul Foster Case (1884–1954), lived not far from her family's home in Melrose during the years 1928–1930.[199] Case had been a high-degree (5° = 6□) member of the Alpha et Omega, one of the successor orders to the original Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, from which he had resigned in 1922. During the later 1920s Case was working on his book, *The True and Invisible*

[197] Thompson (1975).

[198] Mathiesen & Theitic (2005). There we argued that 19 of the 26 couplets came from Thompson's grandmother and the other 7 were the work of Thompson herself. Since then we have concluded that one further couplet (#22) was likely added by Thompson, and not part of the original *Rede.*

[199] *Lothrop's* (1929) city directory for Melrose places Thompson's family at 76 First Street and Paul Foster Case's at 46a Frances Street. The two addresses are only about one mile apart.

Rosicrucian Order, and organizing his own Rosicrucian order, which he was calling either the School of Ageless Wisdom or the Builders of the Adytum (B. O. T. A.). At first the rituals and other documents of his new order seem to have been derived from those used in the Golden Dawn. Eventually he rejected certain parts of his Golden Dawn heritage, most notably its use of John Dee's Enochian magic, but this seems to have happened after the years when he lived in Melrose.

The first three editions of *The True and Invisible Rosicrucian Order* were printed from typescript by a duplication process, in relatively few copies, in the years 1927, 1928 and 1933.[200] These editions seem to have been privately distributed at Case's discretion. (Only long after Case's death in 1954 did the book finally appear in an edition printed from moveable type and offered to the general public for sale.) Since Case was living in Melrose from 1928 to 1930, the second edition was circulated from that city. By the time the third edition was printed in 1933, Case had moved to California.[201]

Thompson knew that her father had been a Rosicrucian, but not to which order or organization he had belonged. It is likely to have been Case's Rosicrucian order. People who have access to Thompson's complete book have found ample support for this speculation, including material that came from the Golden Dawn, but had not been copied from Israel Regardie's four-volume compilation of Golden Dawn texts and rituals (which, moreover, had been published only some years after Thompson's father had died).[202]

These people have also established that whoever composed certain other parts of Thompson's book had carefully read several scholarly books and articles by professional academics about Irish and Celtic folklore; these books and journal articles have been identified, and the most recent of them was published in 1938. This writer of those parts of Thompson's book was almost certainly her grandmother, who had the money to buy those books and subscribe to those journals, or alternatively, who had the leisure to read them in the Boston Public Library. These particular texts show no trace of British Wicca, and their language is as polished as it is in the original sixteen couplets of *The Rede of the Wiccae.*

In short, it is as certain as such things ever can be that Thompson did inherit a considerable body of occult, mythological and folkloric written materials from her grandmother and her father, to which she later added elements that she had borrowed from British Wicca. It is in this later form that she passed her inherited tradition of Witchcraft on to her own initiates.

[200] Case (1927, 1928, 1933).
[201] Clark (2013), pp. 71–92.
[202] Regardie (1937–1940).

8.7 Elizabeth Pepper and The Witches' Almanac

Elizabeth Pepper (1923–2005) was born and raised in Rhode Island, where she graduated from Pembroke College (now absorbed by Brown University), and then from the Rhode Island School of Design.[203] After college she moved to Manhattan, where she found employment as the Art Director for *Gourmet* magazine (1956–1963). There she met an immigrant English journalist, John Wilcock, with whom she launched her very influential annual publication, *The Witches' Almanac,* in 1971.[204] Its title page announced that the *Almanac* combines "the mysterious wiccan and arcane secrets of an old England witch with one from New England." The "old England witch" is obviously Wilcock; the "one from New England" is Pepper, and they both identified themselves as Witches here.

Elizabeth Pepper with black cat
(Pepper & Wilcock 1977, back cover)

The *Almanac* went through nine issues, from 1971 to 1979; then it ceased publication for eleven years. Pepper and Wilcock relaunched it in 1991, and it has been published every year since then. (After her death in 2005, her editorial staff and friends made sure it continued to be published.)

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[203] She entered into a life-long, happy marriage with a fellow artist, Martin da Costa, in 1962. She did not use her married name in any Witchcraft context, preferring to keep her mundane life wholly separate from her work on her *Almanac.* (It is only after her death that I have felt free to mention her married name publicly.) Also, public vital records make it clear that she was born in 1923, not 1926 as is often stated.

[204] John Wilcock (1927–2018) was one of the founders of *The Village Voice,* a New York newspaper for the creative community of the city. Ten years later, in 1965, he left that newspaper to co-found (and, for only a few months, to edit) the *East Village Other,* which was the first "underground newspaper" in Manhattan. In his autobiography (Wilcock 2009, ch. 17) he tells how he met Pepper and how they launched the *Almanac;* to judge by his account, he had had no great interest in magic or witchcraft before becoming acquainted with her.

Pepper was also the author of eight other books and booklets on magic, two of which she co-authored with John Wilcock and one with a fellow editor of the *Almanac,* Barbara Stacy.[205] She also published one book and several booklets of selected articles from past issues of the *Almanac.*[206]

Elizabeth Jeanette Pepper was the daughter of Edward C. Pepper and Agnes Gertrude Ryan. Her mother was one of five grown daughters of Dennis and Johanna (Mahar) Ryan. She was her mother's only child and her maternal grandmother's only grandchild.[207]

Her grandmother, her mother and all four of her aunts on the distaff side, she said, had strong occult and magical interests, and even specialities: one of them was an astrologer, for example, another was a spell-caster, a third read tarot cards for clients, and so on. Since all six women were very close, and they all lived within easy walking distance of one another during the years when young Elizabeth was growing up, she learned her magic from all of them in the course of her everyday life. All six women regarded themselves as witches.[208] As Pepper said in an interview, witchcraft was simply what her family knew how to do, rather than their religion:

> Religion is far heavier a focus today than the Craft I grew up to know. That is not to say our work wasn't considered sacred, for it was very serious indeed. The structure of beliefs and ethical considerations were of an entirely different framework.

In this same interview she describes how her family did some of its magic:

> Something was always happening—a disagreeable boss giving trouble, love affair that wasn't working out—we'd concentrate to make it right, turning negatives to positives.
> . . . . .
> As soon as I could comprehend the nature of the problem to be solved or turned right, even in very simple terms, I joined my mind with the rest. Young children often bring a surprising amount of mental energy to the case at hand. [209]

The magic that Pepper describes here is pretty clearly an example of the sort of magic that William Walker Atkinson presented in his books on "Mind Power" (see section 2.5 above), though it was worked by a group of closely related women rather than a single person.

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[205] Pepper & Wilcock (1993[a], 1996); Pepper (1996, 1997, 1999, 2001[a], 2001[b]); Pepper & Stacy (2000).
[206] Pepper & Wilcock (1977, 1993[b], 1996–1997).
[207] Pepper, personal communications. She always said that there had been a sixth daughter, whom "the sea took" as a young child at Matunuck; so far I have found no trace of this daughter in any documentary source.
[208] Pepper (1999), p. 72–73, specifically identifies one of her aunts, Katherine Irena (Ryan) Anderson, as a "New England witch," and prints a spell from her handwritten book of spells.
[209] Theitic (2007), reprinted in Theitic (2020), pp. 185–187. See also her obituary (Stacy 2006), reprinted in Theitic (2020), pp. 174–175.

8.8 The Harpy Coven in Oregon

The prominent California Witch, Victor Anderson (1917–2001), founder and first Grand Master of the Feri Tradition of Witchcraft, often told how as a youth he had been a member of the Harpy Coven at Ashland, Oregon, from 1932 until 1943.[210] If his own title as head of the Feri Tradition, Grand Master, reflects the usage of the Harpy Coven, then that coven, like the ones in Chicago and Birmingham, may have descended from the Inner Circle of Witches established by Olney H. Richmond and his partner, Arlene L. Richmond, within their Ancient Order of the Magi (see sections 8.3–8.4).

8.9 Pre-Gardnerian Traditions of Witchcraft in General

The several family traditions of Witchcraft that we have surveyed in this section do not all have their roots in the same soil. Gundella's family tradition of Witchcraft in Michigan appears to have grown out of Spiritualism, as does Bonnie Sherlock's in Wyoming. Kitty Lessing's tradition came to her through her husband's family, and it seems to be rooted in the occult and esoteric Order of the Magi, founded by Olney H. Richmond. Gwynne Thompson's tradition, which she inherited from her paternal grandmother and her father, seems to have three sources: the magical folklore of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, the magic taught in some Rosicrucian order—very likely in Paul Foster Case's School of Ancient Wisdom—and several scholarly books and articles about Celtic mythology and magic. And Elizabeth Pepper's family magic, so far as she has described it, resembles most of all the mental magic developed within the New Thought, or Metaphysical, group of new American religions.

The only thing that almost all of them have in common is that they lay claim to Celtic roots: Gundella had Scottish ancestry; Bonnie Sherlock and Gwynne Thompson had Irish ancestry; Kitty Lessing's coven emphasized Irish lore in its training program; and Elizabeth Pepper noted that her maternal grandfather was an Irishman, while her father had Welsh, Scottish and Irish ancestors. This may not be highly significant; a great number of United States citizens have at least one Celtic ancestor somewhere in their family trees, and since at least the later 1800s all the Celts have been widely regarded as particularly mystical and magical peoples.

There were, additionally, a certain number of other alternate Pagan and magical religions and counter-religions that took shape in the United States during the twentieth century. However, since these religions did not call themselves Witchcraft, and their members did not claim that they were Witches, they do not concern us here.[211]

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[210] Clifton (2006), pp. 129–131; Kelly (2014), 28–29; Doyle White (2016), pp. 46–48. Two of the four members of the Harpy Coven named by Kelly can be identified in genealogical records online: Jerome Earl Warren (1886–1967), the male leader, and James Douglas Murdoch (1913–1991). The female leader, Maybelle Warren does not appear in any record, unless perhaps she was Warren's eventual fourth and last wife, actually named Della Alma (1891–1975); he was her second husband. I have been unable to trace the fourth of the named members, Patricia Fern.
[211] Clifton (2006) is an excellent introduction to these other Pagan religions.

Section 9

British Wicca Crosses the Atlantic

9.1 Background for the Next Step: Gerald B. Gardner and The Wica *in England*

Meanwhile, back in Old England and quite out of sight to North Americans, another new counter-religion of Witchcraft was taking shape and catching the British public's eye. Its most vocal advocate was a retired civil servant named Gerald Brosseau Gardner (1884–1964), who also labored to develop its practices and doctrines. He called its adherents, taken collectively, *The Wica.* His odd term was soon crowded out by a slightly different pair of terms: the religion itself soon came to be called *Wicca,* and the people who practiced that religion, *Wiccans.*[212]

In 1945 Gardner had published a novel, *High Magic's Aid,* featuring a medieval English woman who adhered to this ancient religion. That, however, was presented to the public as a work of fiction. In 1954 his first avowedly non-fiction book about Witchcraft appeared, titled *Witchcraft Today.* In 1959 he published a second such book, *The Meaning of Witchcraft.* In both of these books he claimed that an ancient Pagan religion had indeed survived, and had been practiced in deepest secrecy in Britain down through many long centuries since the island was converted to Christianity. In this claim he echoed the earlier books of Margaret Alice Murray (for whom see section 6.6), and Murray herself contributed a short preface to *Witchcraft Today.*[213]

However, Gardner went far beyond Murray in his claim that this ancient Pagan religion had survived down to his own days, that he had met some of its last practitioners, and that he, too, had been initiated into it and was now one of its faithful adherents.

Gardner was something of a publicity seeker, and soon a number of British women and men, attracted by his books, came to him wanting to be initiated into this formerly secret ancient religion. He obliged them, and Wicca was off to a running start. By 1964, when Gardner died, there were more than enough initiated Wiccans to ensure that the religion he had fostered would outlast him.

The history of Wicca in England during these seminal years, and through the many decades that followed them, has been very well studied in recent years.[214] There is no need to recapitulate it here. Only one detail needs further comment: the influence of Spiritualism on British Wicca.

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[212] The newer terminology (*wicca* and *wiccan*) seems to have been first introduced by Charles Cardell (1895–1977). Seims (2021) gives the best account of Cardell's life and works; for his use of the terms *wicca, wiccan, wiccen* and *wishan* see pp. 9, 60, 69, 120–123, 265, 284, 325.

[213] Gardner (1954), pp. 15–16.

[214] For the history of British Wicca see Hutton (1999, 2019), Howard (2009), Evans & Green (2009), Doyle White (2016), and Feraro & Doyle White (2019). Whitmore (2010) offers a weak critique of Hutton's book. On Gardner himself see also Bracelin (1960) and Hesselton (2000, 2003, 2012).

Ronald Hutton wrote, in his preface to the first edition of *The Triumph of the Moon:*

> In the writing of the book I had to familiarize myself with many aspects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century British culture which had hitherto been but vaguely known to me, and my hope is that my perpective as a scholar of pagan witchcraft provided some views of them which will be of interest to experts. I have probably failed to include some which will later prove to have significance for the subject, and my own suspicion is that the greatest invisible player in the story is spiritualism. This is credited with importance at moments—and the evidence which I uncovered suggested that this treatment was enough—but it may well turn out that an extended examination of it, on the lines of those provided (for example) for cunning craft and woodcraft movements, would have been more appropriate. Such a treatment is only just becoming possible because of the growing quantity of detailed research, and it should be relatively easy to make a study of its relationship with witchcraft and ritual magic in the future.[215]

At least in the United States, as we have seen, Spiritualism was most certainly a major player in the rise and acceptance of the New Witch and her Witchcraft, and its role was hardly invisible. Spiritualism had also become a wide-spread religion in Britain by Gardner's day. It is certainly significant that Gardner himself, in his ghost-written autobiography, devotes an entire chapter to his amateur investigation of the claims of Spiritualist mediums during the year 1927, and again in 1932—investigations which left him firmly convinced that some Spiritualist mediums really could relay messages from spirits of the dead.[216]

Quite recently, Christina Oakley Harrington, who became a member of Gardner's original coven in the 1980s, has noted that early Wiccans regularly used séances and crystal-gazing (scrying) to obtain "guidance from the Other Side." She also writes, "It seems that the New Forest friends of the 1930s began their formation of the coven through séances."[217]

All this activity of Gardner's happened in Britain only, wholly out of sight to people who lived across the Atlantic in the United States. To be sure, McCabe's Little Blue Book on Murray's theory had been widely read (see section 6.6 again), but that had been published in 1926, long before Gardner ever put pen to paper, and it offered no hint that any such religion might have survived down to our own times.

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[215] Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. xi. The second edition of his book (Hutton 2019) omits the preface which contains this paragraph, but does not have more to say than the first edition about the role that Spiritualism played in the development of British Wicca. See now also the very brief comment on Hutton's paragraph by Francis Cameron (2010), who was a Spiritualist before he became a Wiccan, and was struck by the similarities between the two religions.

[216] Bracelin (1960), ch. 9.

[217] Harrington (2022), pp. xxv–xxvi, 152, 271–273.

Nonetheless, it took only about a decade for British Wicca to cross the Atlantic Ocean and enter the United States. Once it had done so, it had a huge impact on all the earlier American ideas of Witchcraft as a religion, and it transformed American Witchcraft forever.

9.2 The Bucklands Come to the United States

As the story is commonly told, Ray Buckland (1934–2017) and his then wife Rosemary (born 1936) moved from Britain to the United States in 1962. They had discovered Gardner's books, had become interested in his claims and had begun to correspond with him. In 1963 they went back to England briefly, and were initiated into Wicca there. After their initiation they returned to the United States and began to initiate a fair number of interested people here. This was the beginning of British Wicca in the United States, as the tale is usually told.

But this may not be the full story. A British Witch (though not a Wiccan) had come to the United States a year or two earlier.

9.3 Audrey Nicholson, a British Witch (but not a Wiccan)

During the school year 1961/62 the High School in Berkeley, California, hosted an exchange teacher from England, from the Mayfield County Secondary School for Girls in Ilford, Sussex. Her name was Audrey Nicholson (1924–1996), and she made a powerful impression on the students in her classes, which were on English literature. She was a small, energetic woman with red hair and a dynamic personality, and she had an infectious love for English literature, especially its poetry and poets.[218]

And she let her high-school classes know that she was a Witch![219]

Was Nicholson not only a Witch, but a British Wiccan? I have now been reliably informed that she was not; there is no trace of her in either the collective memory of the British Gardnerian community, nor is there any mention of her in the considerable available written traces.[220] No doubt her self-identification as a Witch rested on some other foundation than a Gardnerian initiation—maybe on one or more of the same foundations on which women in the United States had come to identify themselves as Witches, as discussed throughout this book.

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[218] Obituaries of Nicholson: Kociejowski (1996), Rudolf (1996), Anonymous (1996), Anderson (1996).

[219] The younger sister of a classmate of mine at Berkeley High School was a student in Nicholson's English classes during her senior year there. It was she who first told me, many years ago, that Nicholson had told her students that she was a witch. (At the time my informant did not recall her teacher's name, which I was able to discover only recently from a close examination of Berkeley High School's yearbooks for 1961/62; once she heard the name from me, she was able to confirm it.)

[220] Christina Oakley Harrington (personal communication).

The most heartfelt of Nicholson's obituaries noted in passing that she felt a special connection to the Pendle Witches (who were tried and executed in 1612 at Lancashire), and also that "she dwelt in the poetic realm" all her life.[221] That may be all it took, ultimately, for her to call herself a Witch. That would be enough.

Audrey Nicholson
(Anderson n.d.)

Margaret St. Clair
(St. Clair 1946)

9.4 Margaret St. Clair and British Wicca

During the same school year (1961/2) that Audrey Nicholson was teaching at Berkeley High School, information was quietly circulating among some of its students that instruction in witchcraft was being offered to interested adults (21 years old or older) in a house somewhere in the Berkeley Hills. (These are the hills that run along the eastern edge of Berkeley and its neighboring towns). Since neither I nor my friends were old enough at the time, we did not try to find out more about these classes, or who the instructor was—an omission I have since regretted.

The question naturally arises, who was offering these classes. Was it Nicholson? Or was it someone else?

There actually is a second possibility. A somewhat older couple, Margaret and Raymond Earl ("Eric") St. Clair, were living in the Berkeley Hills at the time, and they were both deeply interested in magic and witchcraft.[222] Eventually they entered into correspondence with the

[221] Kociejowski (1996).

[222] Their house was at 6616 Skyline Drive, in the unincorporated district of El Sobrante, just north of Berkeley and just east of Richmond.

Bucklands, who initiated them into British Wicca in 1966.[223] However, as early as 1963 Margaret St. Clair (1911–1995) had already published a science-fiction novel, *The Sign of the Labrys,* wherein she displays considerable familiarity with some of the finer details of British Wicca. Clearly she had read deeply about witchcraft, and had also paid very close attention to at least two of Gerald Gardner's books, his novel, *High Magic's Aid,* and his non-fictional book, *Witchcraft Today,* some years before her Gardnerian initiation[224]

It is certainly possible that the St. Clairs were the people offering classes in witchcraft in their home in the early 1960s, which they could have based partly on Gardner's books, but also on other sources that we have already discussed in earlier sections.

9.5 The Gardnerian Magnet: British Wicca Transforms American Witchcraft

The Bucklands, as noted above, initiated a considerable number of people in the United States into British Wicca; in turn, their initiates initiated others. Also, other initiated Wiccans crossed the Atlantic from the British Isles. It was not long before British Wiccans outnumbered the few pre-Gardnerian Witches in the United States by a considerable margin. Also, although British Wicca has its secrets, the simple existence of that religion in the United States was never secret, while the relatively few pre-Gardnerian Witches had historically tended to shun public notice.

So it was not long before British Wicca came generally to be seen as Witchcraft *par excellence,* and its practices viewed as the norms for every sort of Witchcraft. In consequence, the pre-Gardnerian traditions of Witchcraft would often incorporate various Gardnerian elements into their earlier practices and doctrines.

Chas S. Clifton has coined the phrase "the Gardnerian magnet" to describe how this attraction has affected pre-Gardnerian Witchcraft.[225] We already noted the effect of this magnet on Gwynne Thompson's Witchcraft. Bonnie Sherlock's "Delphic Manifesto" also hints at the same effect by mentioning "a Horned God and a Moon Goddess" (see sections 8.5 and 8.6).[226] In contrast, the traditional Coven in Hollywood, Florida, to judge by Kitty Lessing's brief accounts of its doctrines and practices, seems to have resisted the pull of the Gardnerian magnet (see section 8.4).[227]

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[223] Clifton (1997) offers a close study of the author and her novel, and also discusses the sources of her knowledge of witchcraft. See also Clifton (2006), pp. 4, 15–18, 34 (notes 21–29), for further information, including an account of the magical decor of their house by a visitor in 1964.

[224] Gardner (1949, 1954). It is likely that she had also read Gardner's *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959), though her novel doesn't seem to echo any of the new material in that book. Her novel does contain echoes of Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* (1948).

[225] Clifton (2006), p. 111, 132–133.

[226] Sherlock (1972).

[227] Lessing (1972a, 1972b, 1972c).

9.6 Final Remarks

It is not my intention to trace the history of British Wicca in the United States here, or even the history of non-Wiccan traditions of Witchcraft as a religion much beyond the later 1960s. Others have done that already, notably Aidan A. Kelly and Chas S. Clifton.[228]

Rather, I have attempted to shed more light on the largely unexamined history of people, men and women alike, born and raised in the United States, who seriously called themselves Witches, at least on occasion, or who identified some of their uncommon magical and religious practices with Witchcraft, well before anyone in the United States had so much as heard of British Wicca. Their history spans more than a century, from the 1850s to the 1960s, and it is rich in forgotten or overlooked women and men.

For most of these self-identified Witches, their Witchcraft was their magic. For some of them, it was their religion, or their counter-religion. For others it was part of their politics. Nor were these three things exclusive of one another. Any given Witch might combine any two of them, or even all three.

Insofar as these Witches explicitly thought of their Witchcraft as their religion, most often that religion was essentially magical Spiritualism under a new name, which used more magic than mainstream Spiritualism would prefer.[229] In some cases, however, it seems to have been rooted in Nature Religion or Pantheism—both of which are older than Spiritualism in the United States—or in New Thought. When ancient Pagan Deities are named in these pre-Gardnerian Witchcrafts—which happens rarely—they are a veneer laid down on one or another of these older religious movements. These religious Witchcrafts may have been "pagan" in the very broad sense that they were non-Abrahamic religions, but they were not "Pagan religions" in the contemporary, much narrower sense of the term.

Moreover, these Witches held different opinions about the nature of magic that they worked, or that might be made to work in skilled enough hands. Some claimed that the magic they did was purely natural, like the "mental magic" of New Thought, whereas others claimed that it relied on immaterial Beings—on the spirits of the dead, for instance, or on various non-human immaterial Beings.

To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever woven together all the separate threads in this history into a single cord of narrative until now. Nor can the cord I have woven here possibly be the definitive account of this history. Further research by others will certainly be able to shed more light on what I have been able to see only in dim twilight. I am looking forward to reading that research.

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[228] Clifton (2006) and Kelly (2014).

[229] Cf. the mainstream Spiritualist, Andrew Jackson Davis, who strongly criticizes (Davis 1885, pp. 131–135) what he calls "magical Spiritualism," naming Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Emma Hardinge Britten, and the late Paschal Beverly Randolph as its exemplars); he flatly states, "I do not believe in the identity of modern Spiritualism and ancient magic."

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The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals [IAPSOP] maintains an extensive online archive at **http://iapsop.com** not only of periodicals, but also of pamphlets and books, to which I am indebted for access to many of the rarer sources listed here. These items have been marked **[★]** here.

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